

**NUANCES OF TOUCH: EMBODYING AND COMMUNICATING NONVERBAL
CONSENT IN CONTACT IMPROVISATION**

by

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Abstract

Consent and the communication of consent, particularly in intimate person-to-person contexts, has come to the forefront of mainstream cultural discussions since the emergence of the #MeToo movement in 2017. Contact improvisation (CI) communities have also seen a rise in discussions around consent. Across Canada, these discussions have resulted in guidelines, practices, and further discussions, with the intention of clarifying the inherently messy boundaries around embodied negotiations of consent. Despite the conversations, no studies have directly inquired into the practices of nonverbal consent within a CI dance.

To better understand individuals' lived experiences of communicating and embodying consent nonverbally in CI, I employ a phenomenological lens. The works of phenomenologists James Mensch (2009), Max van Manen (1989; 1999; 2006; 2014), and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1968; 2013) guide my theoretical lens and methodology. A video-recorded dance jam, one-on-one interviews, and personal reflections inform a descriptive exploration of the nuances in signification and negotiation of nonverbal consent on the dance floor. By comparing participants' experiences of a jam and exploring moments of consent negotiation through video clips and interviews, participants' experiences and perceptions illuminate how consent is understood and communicated nonverbally in the moment-to-moment negotiations of each co-created dance. Instances of negotiation brought to the forefront were those involving initiating, exiting, risk, play, stillness, and intimacy. Sensuous and descriptive moments of the dance bring to life the complexities, challenges, and joys of the participants' lived experiences of consent. Findings from this study could be used to inform further research on the nonverbal communication of consent, both in CI and other relevant fields.

Lay Summary

Contact improvisation (CI) is an improvised dance form in which partners co-create movement by communicating through a shared point of physical touch. Consent in CI happens most often through nonverbal communication. Although much discussed, nonverbal negotiations of consent within CI have not been researched. The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of nonverbal consent for dancers in a CI dance jam, with the aim of contributing to discussions of consent communication in the CI community and broader society. Instances of negotiation brought to the forefront were those involving initiating, exiting, risk, play, stillness, and intimacy. Sensuous and descriptive moments of the dance bring to life the complexities, challenges, and joys of the participants' experiences of consent. Findings from this study could be used to inform further research on the nonverbal communication of consent, both in CI and other relevant fields.

Preface

I was responsible for the identification, design, and implementation of this research project, with the guidance of Dr. Barbara Weber and Dr. Susan Cox. I collected the primary data for this study in Vancouver, British Columbia, during the summer of 2019. I analysed the data during the fall of 2019.

Ethics approval for this study was granted by the UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board. The certificate number is H19-01543.

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To the ones who inspire me

1. Introduction

The question I pose is a question of communication.

Standing among the bodies on the ground, shifting with their movements. Brief moments of contact rise and fall away. I feel your elbow. Your shoulder. Your back against my leg. I am trying to find my place in this quintet. I see space on the floor between bodies, a new opportunity. Your elbow again, as I step carefully. Through the bodies on the floor, one gentle step and then another. I emerge from the opposite end of the quintet but remain connected. A last small step as I meet another's foot. I balance on one leg, foot to foot with this other. I seek pressure and weight in return. I try twice but find no interaction or response. Pausing. I step closer to the group. I test another foot. This time it is yours. You meet me, in that point of touch, with enough pressure to suspend my body away, allowing me to move into something new, balancing against a fall. Until I choose to fall. (NJ)

I am a dancer and mover. I am also a student and a researcher, in both academia and dance. In these worlds I am inspired to learn. I am constantly inquiring, uncovering, exploring, and pondering. I was drawn to contact improvisation for its constantly curious nature and the way knowledge unfolded through the practice, my own body, and the bodies of my partners. The body is more than a mere physical form - it is integral to being in the world. Bodies in dance are “[...] a living enactment of culture and social beliefs” (Cancienne & Snowber, 2003, p. 244), [...] places

of knowing and inquiry (Cancienne & Snowber, 2003; Snowber, 2012, 2018), and the way in which we experience the world.

Beyond the realm of dance and into the land of academia, embodied being impacts the ways we conduct research and express our understandings. “[...] [T]he pathic phenomenality of a phenomena and the vocative expressivity of writing involve not only our head and hand, but our whole sensual and sentient embodied being” (van Manen, 2014, p. 20). As a first-time researcher undertaking phenomenological inquiry, including the body in my study means not only attending to the bodies of others but calling attention to my own embodiment as well.

I watch, drinking in the landscape of bodies with my eyes, feeling the press of their weight on my stomach, my thighs, and witnessing myself among the others. More real than life, it feels, to witness us through the mirror and from within. I see the bodies on the floor with me, and the ones beyond the mirror, seemingly a room away, building a beautiful, fragile scene unfolding before my eyes. I am struck by the wonder of the moment. I feel consent in the stillness and the watching. In this moment, I am within and without, touching and being touched, present to the weight and breath of our bodies, yet curiously observing the scene unfold. I see her walking through. I see their feet creating a balance point. I hold my upper body off the ground by stacking the bones of my arms behind me, cradling your weight across my lap. A moment of stillness. How did we end up here, in this collective rest, this offer and acceptance of pause? How do you feel in this moment? A pause. A breath of stillness in which

we collectively feel and sense each other through our intertwined bodies and the energy of the dance. Is this a moment of collective consent? Your stomach rests on my pelvis, another body beside the crook of my legs. I feel your warmth and the gravity of your body into mine. (BW)

No two dances are the same. Every body and every space is different each day. I come to my research with the understanding that communication, specifically communication of consent, is inseparable from the practice of contact improvisation (CI) (T'ai, 2017). This communication happens through nonverbal “yes”s and “no”s (Stahmer, 2011; Kimmel, M. et al, 2018) enacted through the dancers’ bodies, most often through touch (Paxton, 1975; Stahmer, 2011). Their bodies speak with one another, asking, offering, listening, negotiating, and responding to questions about boundaries, weight, and intention. A dancer applies pressure to the top of another’s foot with her own - *Will you support my weight and help me balance?* I stand calmly, grounded and supported against my partner’s back - *Can we dance slowly and intimately?* He folds his body over her shoulder and spirals toward her centre – *Yes, please lift me.* His head is coming too close to my face, so I push and direct it with my hand – *No, I don’t want you rolling over my face, but you can go toward my shoulder.* Their eyes meet – *Is this okay for you?* They smile - *Yes, let’s continue.* In each micro-moment of their improvised co-creation, dancers continuously communicate and enact consent.

My love of contact improvisation drew the dance form into my research, and the call for a culture of consent brought my learnings in contact improvisation to the forefront of daily and academic conversations. I started practicing contact improvisation in 2013 and was quickly drawn to the form and the discussions surrounding the practice. Contact improvisation surprised me by

being both challenging and exhilarating, pushing me to learn and face fears while providing a safe space to play and grow. I was nearly overwhelmed with the knowledge I gained by practicing CI. I learned about myself, relating and communicating through touch, setting boundaries, consenting through my body, listening, and being responsive. As I continued to practice, I became immersed in the community's conversations of trust, safety, consent, and the parallels between CI and everyday life. In the global CI community, consent is a prevalent topic of discussion both on (Keogh, 2003; T'ai, 2017) and off the dance floor (T'ai, 2017; Yardley, 2017; Beaulieux, 2019a; Beaulieux, 2019b). Consent and the communication of consent, particularly in intimate person-to-person contexts, has claimed importance in mainstream cultural discussions since the emergence of the #MeToo movement in 2017 (Barmak, 2018; ME TOO, 2018; Remnick, 2018). Many off-the-dance-floor conversations in CI have paralleled those of the #MeToo movement, focusing on power imbalance and sexual violence. These conversations also parallel discussions on campuses, for example the UBC campus's "enthusiastic yes" campaign (The University of British Columbia, n.d.), focusing on the signifying act of "yes" or "no", which can also be seen within a dance. Recent attempts to address how consent is communicated, like this campaign, often focus on the verbal communication of consent. They mention but have little discussion about consent's nonverbal aspects. However, nonverbal communication is vital and embedded in how we communicate everyday, as shown by research into the communication of sexual consent (Beres, Herold, & Maitland, 2004; Beres, 2007, 2014; Beres & Macdonald, 2016; Barmak, 2018; Levand, 2019; Willis & Jozkowski, 2019). To ignore the nonverbal facet of consent is to overlook an important piece of consenting. In contrast to the emphasis on verbal consent, the negotiations of consent in CI provide insight into different ways that people communicate "yes" and "no" nonverbally through their bodies.

These musings across CI and everyday life first brought the topic of nonverbal communication of consent to my awareness. How do we ensure that everyone feels safe in a jam? How can physical and emotional safety or support be provided? What constitutes inappropriate touch? Can what we learn about consent in CI be transferred across contexts to other areas of life? As I dove further, I had other conversations with dancers that furthered my interest. For example, I discussed with others how nonverbally communicating and embodying consent has implications for dancing with an injury or working with people who are nonverbal. What implications do injury have for self-awareness or consenting to risky movement in a dance? What can we learn through CI about nonverbal communication that might translate to work with individuals who are nonverbal? Regardless of the situation, the commonality between the different conversations and stories is the experience of consenting. And so, my focus became the experience of nonverbally consenting in contact improvisation, with the aim of better understanding the nuances involved in nonverbal communications of consent and providing a foundation from which to explore these various conversations further.

My torso is supported by your lower back. My knees are on the ground, taking some of my weight. As you twist, I follow you, rotating into my backspace, curling in and over a different set of legs. Another touches my elbow, my back, my elbow. I return the connection lightly, but my focus is not fully on those points. Your eyes meet mine, and I see your joy mirroring my own. A moment of checking in within this lovely careful quintet. You shift your knee underneath me, picking up my torso with the tops of your legs. I rest, cradled in the crook of your body as you sit. Together we create and allow this

comfortable stillness to be. I am stable here. My right foot continues to reach for the others, feeling one foot and then another in this quintet. I feel her foot under mine and return the weight she gives. An organic unravelling begins. (MD)

The purpose of my work was descriptive and exploratory, to better understand individuals' lived experiences of communicating consent nonverbally in contact improvisation dance. The significance of my research was its contribution to knowledge about how consent is communicated, adding to the conversations about consent within academia, CI, and everyday life. T'ai (2017) brought the concept of consent explicitly into the practice of CI. I aimed to extend this work, but rather than teaching and learning about consent in CI, I looked at how consent is communicated within the form. My research addressed and added knowledge to conversations in the CI community, but from a new perspective. Negotiations of consent were enacted, or signified, in different ways. Into these significations and their underlying negotiations I inquired. I did not try to provide guidelines or rules for how consent ought to be communicated, but instead, looked at how it is already in place, enacted and experienced, between partners, within a dance.

The questions at the heart of this study were: (a) How is consent embodied and communicated nonverbally in a contact improvisation dance? (b) What do these communications look like and feel like? And, (c) how do the experiences of consent communication differ for dancers involved in the same moment of conflict or consent?

This study was a phenomenological inquiry into consent. I inquired into participants' lived experiences of moments within a dance, which hold potential for the negotiation of consent. I described these moments in sensuous language, trying to capture a moment as it happened, rather than a moment as it was remembered. Through these written accounts, I attempted "[...] to explore

directly the original or prereflective dimensions of human existence: life as we live it” (van Manen, 2014, p. 39). The three sets of italicized text included in this introduction are from the same moment of a dance, but from three different perspectives. The participants whose lived experiences these descriptions attempt to capture are, in order, Nicole, Brynn, and Michael. The dancers’ three different sets of senses reawaken the experience of the quintet described. The fourth and fifth voices of the quintet are included in section 6.1. Descriptive moments provide insight into the complexities of individuals’ lived experiences and show the differences and similarities of those experiences within a shared moment of negotiation. I used sensuous, evocative description and sensitive questioning and interpretation to highlight the communication of nonverbal consent and how each person’s understanding of these lived experiences were embodied through actions and responses within a dance.

In the following pages, this thesis outlines current research and discussions in contact improvisation and consent. Although consent is a topic of interest within the global CI community, little research on consent and CI exists. Following a review of the literature, I detail my methodology and method for exploring how consent is embodied and communicated nonverbally. My phenomenological lens references the works of James Mensch (2009), Max van Manen (1989; 1999; 2006; 2014), and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1968; 2013). Their works guide my writing, in-depth explorations, and reflections, as I position the body as necessary in lived experience and try to capture meaning in prereflective moments. The study design is detailed through an outline, participant involvement, data collection, data analysis, and representation of findings. Following the study design, I present three sections of lived experience descriptions derived from participants’ experiences in the study. An interpretive discussion follows, using sensuous and evocative examples from the study and linking them to the literature and further inquiry. The

concluding chapter of the thesis discusses implications from the study's findings, strengths and limitations of the work, and potential direction for future research.

2. Literature Review

Contact improvisation (CI) is a cooperative improvisational dance between partners engaging in easeful movement pathways by sharing body weight and following a shared, moving point of physical touch. Contact improvisation arose out of American counter-cultural movements in the 1960s (Novack, 1990), beginning with Steve Paxton's experimental performance called *Magnesium*. Contact improvisers refer to *Magnesium* as "[...]the 'seminal work' of contact improvisation[...]" (p. 61). The video, *Fall after Newton* (Paxton et al., 1984), displays sections of *Magnesium*, from the stillness of "the stand" to college men running and throwing themselves at one another. *Magnesium* shows the explorational beginning of contact improvisation, as the men tested the interplay between their bodies' protective mechanisms and gravity. Paxton (1975) describes how dancers interact through "the balance of inertias, momentums, psychologies, [and] spirits of the partners" (p. 41). The physical point of contact establishes a line of communication through which the partners can listen and respond to one another, co-creating a dance in each moment. Despite these acknowledged beginnings, the definition and purpose of CI is continuously discussed amongst practitioners around the world.

Paxton (1975) focuses on contact improvisation as a purely physical form, stating in an interview, "I don't see CI as politics, sex therapy, or mental health among nations. If it has a role, it is as itself: a research and update on the ability to blend and cooperate, a comment on verbal communication's complexity, well-rounded exercise, fun, and perhaps an improved feeling of communion between people" (Bachrach et al., 2018). Like Paxton, researchers who inquire into creativity in CI focus on the physicality of the form (Torrents, Castañer, Dinušová & Anguera, 2011; Torrents, Ric, & Hristovski, 2015; Kimmel, Hristova, & Kussmaul, 2018).

The question of whether or not CI should remain a “pure” form, focused on physicality, is under debate, with dancers and teachers arguing for intersections in CI (Bachrach et al., 2018; Smith et al. 2018). With a focus on intersections, and in contrast to Paxton, researchers and practitioners speak to the politics of CI (Goldman, 2007; Beaulieux, 2019a; Radical Contact, 2019; Yohalem, 2019). The values of egalitarianism and communality were foundational for the counter-cultural movements in the 1960s and are said to be woven into the dance form itself (Novack, 1990), yet researchers and dancers speak to imbalances of power and privilege still present in the form (Davies, 2008; Mang, Torrado , & Chan, 2017; Bachrach et al., 2018; Smith et al. 2018; Beaulieux, 2019a; Mitra, 2019; Radical Contact, 2019).

Contact improvisation has also been taken out of the context of a “pure” form and used in educational (Vetter & Dorgo, 2009; Berselli & Lulkin, 2017; T’ai, 2017; Rösch, 2018) and therapeutic (Houston, 2009; Marchant, Sylvester, & Earhart’s, 2010; Barrero & Garavito, 2019) settings. Dancers who take CI off the dance floor and into other contexts argue for CI’s transferability to other areas of life and the power of touch (Houston, 2009; Jussilainen, 2015). “[...]the interpretations of touch offered by contact improvisation allow participants the possibility of constituting the body and self differently” (Novack, 1990, p. 172) by subverting body-mind dualism and shifting the view of the body from being inextricably and overtly linked with sexuality to a body that is intelligent and responsive. Anna Jussilainen (2015) speaks to the healing potential of touch, which is exemplified through positive change in prisoners’ communication and confidence in Houston’s (2009) work. Despite acknowledging that “[...] concerns about [touch’s] destructive potential are rising” (Jussilainen, 2015, p. 114), Jussilainen positions touch in CI as a powerful tool for wellbeing, relating, and building community.

The necessity of communication in CI is undebated, especially nonverbal communication through touch; although, verbal and other modes of nonverbal communication perform important roles in the CI as well. Kimmel, Hristova, and Kussmaul (2018) describe how “[...] dancers produce a stream of momentary micro-intentions that say “yes, and”, or “no, but” to short-lived micro-affordances, which allows both individuals to skilfully continue, elaborate, tweak, or redirect the collective movement dynamics" (p. 1). The “yes” and “no” negotiation of consent that occurs in CI is the vehicle through which dancers co-create movement safely, so learning to communicate through the body in this way is essential to dancing CI. As Keogh (2003) states, “Until a person has the confidence and ability to say no to something, he or she won’t have the trust and capacity to fully say yes to it” (p.62). In Contact Improvisation, practicing consent, both verbally and nonverbally, setting boundaries, and building trust are imperative and constantly practiced. However, no studies have directly inquired into these practices of consent within a CI dance. Gina T’ai’s (2017) exploration with university students addresses the concept of consent and the discussion generated by exploring the consent through CI. Quantitative and qualitative research focusing on creativity in CI address nonverbal communication (Torrents, Castañer, Dinušová & Anguera, 2011; Torrents, Ric, & Hristovski, 2015; Kimmel, Hristova, & Kussmaul, 2018), but not from the perspective of consent.

Discussions centered around safety (Keogh, 2003; Keogh, 2018; Ceder, 2019), ethics (Lalitarāja, 2017), and consent (T’ai, 2017; Beaulieux, 2019a; Beaulieux, 2019b) are prevalent in CI communities around the globe. Online and offline conversations revolve around the topics of safety and consent. Some of these discussions have materialized into written material (Yardley, 2017b), organized discussions, and jam guidelines (Contact Improv Calgary, 2018; Toronto Sunday Contact Improv, 2019). Practitioners attempt to make explicit the principles which

underlay the practice of CI, to provide structure and safety, as well as to reveal and subvert structural power dynamics (Yardley, 2017a; Alvarez, 2019; Beaulieux, 2019a, 2019b). T'ai (2017) used CI as a platform, stating that “[c]onsent is a huge part of practicing Contact Improvisation. To practice CI is to practice consent[...]” (para.4), to explore issues of campus sexual assault with university students. Beaulieux (2019a; 2019b) criticizes what is often referred to as the first rule of contact improvisation: “take care of yourself” (p. 46); because it sides with the privileged and the responsibility for preventing problems is thrust onto the victims.

In these discussions, CI comes starkly into contact with conversations around consent in everyday life, particularly around the topic of sexual assault (Beres, 2007; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014; Barmak, 2018; MeToo, 2018; Remnick, 2018; Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 2018; Stop Street Harassment, 2018; The University of British Columbia, n.d.). The upsurge of the #MeToo movement in 2017 catalyzed a series of lawsuits and discussions about sexual assault and consent, which prompted influential bodies (Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 2018; The University of British Columbia, n.d.) to respond with campaigns attempting to clearly define consent and stressing that a verbal “enthusiastic yes” means “yes”. Melanie Beres’s (2007) literature review complexifies the concept of consent while also trying to clarify and define sexual consent. Beres recommends researchers to engage in qualitative, contextualized studies of the way that consent is communicated between partners (p. 106). As a researcher interested in the communication of consent, I wonder where the responsibility lies in ensuring people are not violating others’ boundaries or being violated, both sexually and non-sexually. Safety in CI does not end at the dancers’ physical forms. The intimacy of the dance requires listening for and responding to the boundaries of others and self, both physical and psychological. Intense listening

to oneself and one's partner through the medium of touch is essential for moment-to-moment re-negotiation of consent.

Consent is a term found across disciplines and areas of life, from medicine to law, research to personal relationships, and beyond. How consent is understood and enacted differs across contexts (Kleinig, 2010). For example, consent given in a research setting by signing a consent form is different than an enthusiastic yes for sexual intimacy within intimate relationships. The body of academic literature on consent is vast, covering consent theory and practice across disciplines. Recent articles about consent communication are found in fields such as medicine, research, education, ethics, psychology, and law. These areas are not distinct. Studies concerning consent span more than one discipline at a time. For example, consent in medical research addresses the educational process of ensuring informed consent (Flory, & Emanuel, 2004; Plasek et al, 2011; Chill, Dior & Shveiky, 2019), as well as the capacity to consent in vulnerable populations (Palmer et al, 2018; Holden et al, 2018). Nonverbal consent in these studies is most often written signification of consent, not consent involving bodily nuances of communication. However, Flory & Emanuel (2004) found person-person interactions to be most effective for improving the process of informed consent, and Plasek et al. (2011) specifically examined nonverbal and verbal communications that reinforce informed written consent. Through observational analysis, Plasek et al. (2011) noted specific nonverbal communications present in informed consent sessions, discussed which were relevant for conveying information, and suggested how they might be beneficial in multimedia informed consent processes.

The topic of sexual consent is prevalent in recent research, often bridging the fields of ethics, law, and psychology. Literature on sexual consent approaches the topic from a variety of angles, for example, through: education and learning to consent (Beres, 2014; Richmond &

Peterson, 2019; Willis, Canan, Jozkowski, & Bridges, 2019), communication of sexual consent in different contexts (Beres, & Macdonald, 2016; Levand, 2019; Willis & Jozkowski, 2019), and understanding the definition and complexities of sexual consent (Beres, 2007). Studies concerning nonverbal aspects of sexual consent (Beres, 2010; Jozkowski, Peterson, Sanders, Dennis, & Reece, 2014; Willis, Blunt-Vinti & Jozkowski, 2019) come close to the kind of nonverbal consent embodied in contact improvisation, because both involve intimate and potentially ambiguous person-to-person interaction.

Consent has rarely been approached with a phenomenological lens, looking at the lived experience of consent for individuals. However, one study by Indonesian researchers Lutfatulatifah, Adriany, and Kurniati (2019) inquired into children's consent in research through a phenomenological lens. Their study used a reflective approach to explore teachers' understandings of consent when doing research with young children, finding a concerning lack of understanding about children's rights in the researchers' experiences. The study did not directly address the communicative aspects of consent.

Books concerning the topic of consent attempt to conceptualize and theorize consent across contexts. *The Ethics of Consent: Theory and Practice*, edited by ethics researchers Franklin Miller and Alan Wertheimer (2010). *The Ethics of Consent* presents consent through the contributions of distinguished scholars in various fields. The scholars write about the theoretical and practical ethics of consent across contexts, including medicine, research, law, politics, and sexual intimacy. The tensions and challenges of conceptualizing and theorizing consent are evident across contexts, as consent proves a difficult phenomenon to concretely describe and conceptualize.

When I use the concept of consent theoretically, I look to John Kleinig's chapter, *The Nature of Consent*, in Miller & Wertheimer's (2010) *The Ethics of Consent*. Kleinig discusses

consent's "moral magic", looking at consent theoretically and across contexts. Kleinig posits moral magic as the power of consent. When consent is given, consent's moral magic is at work. The moral magic is consent's ability to alter the moral relations between the consenter and the agent asking for consent to be given. When consent is given, the moral relations are altered in such a way that "[...]an act or outcome that would not be permissible absent the consent is given a normative sanction" (Kleinig, 2010, p.4). Consent has the power to shift an act or outcome that would not be deemed acceptable under normal circumstances to one that is accepted. For example, normally, rolling one's chest across a stranger's chest would not be considered permissible, however, given the container of a contact improvisation space and the consent of both partners in a dance, this movement becomes an accepted part of the dance. Beres's (2007) work parallels Kleinig's discussion of consent, albeit solely from a sexual consent perspective. Beres critiques the idea of moral magic, stating that

[c]onsent, while important, does not transform a morally problematic activity into a morally acceptable one. Between consenting people, it can communicate the willingness to participate in sexual activity with one another at a specific time and place; there is no moral objection to the sexual activity between them. (p. 102)

Beyond the transformative moral power of consent, Kleinig's (2010, p. 7-20) discussion of consent includes the following notions. Consent is a communicative act for which responsibility is assumed. Because consent is a social act, for consent to be given it must be signified. The way that consent is signified or enacted differs across contexts, as does the way that consent is withdrawn. Withdrawing consent also requires signification. Consent can be given over the short-term or long term. For an act or outcome to be consensual, four conditions must be met: (a) competence - the agent giving consent must be of age and competent (p. 13-14); (b) voluntariness

- consent must be given voluntarily (p. 14-16); (c) knowledge - the agent consenting must have sufficient knowledge about what they are consenting to (p. 16-17); and, (d) intention - the intentions and assumptions underlying the consent must be clear and understood (p. 17-20). An act or obligation, short or long-term, continuous or singular, may be considered non-consensual with these conditions unmet.

Given the discussions and literature surrounding contact improvisation and consent, I wondered *how* individuals experience and enact consent in CI. I investigated this level of communication, hoping to unpack embodied, nonverbal consent by delving deeply into sensuous experience. Contact improvisation was an ideal form to investigate this kind of “yes”, “no”, nonverbal communication of consent, because constant negotiation between bodies in motion and nonverbal communication are inherent in the form.

3. Methodology and Method

3.1 Theoretical Lens and Methodology

A phenomenological methodology was used to gain insight into how contact improvisers experience consent with and through their bodies in a dance. I drew from phenomenologists Max van Manen (1989; 1999; 2006; 2014), Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1968; 2013), and James Mensch (2009) to frame my research and the embodied experience of being in the world. The phenomenological concepts that rise to the surface and underly my research include: the moment of the Now, lived experience, intertwining, and intercorporeity. In the following pages, I describe how my writing and research is grounded in a phenomenological approach, and then I briefly expand on each of the concepts above and how they relate to my research.

As a renowned Canadian scholar and phenomenologist in the field of education and human sciences (van Manen, Higgins, & van der Riet, 2016, p. 4), Max van Manen's writings guided my phenomenological inquiry and writing. According to van Manen (2014), the phenomenological method poses a challenge, because it cannot be reduced to a mere set of strategies or guidelines (p. 372). The approach taken by the researcher must be discovered anew and in response to the particular phenomenon under phenomenological inquiry. Van Manen proposes a "[...] basic method of phenomenology as the taking up of a certain attitude and practicing a certain attentive awareness to the things of the world as we live them rather than as we conceptualize or theorize them" (van Manen, 2006, p. 720). The phenomenological attitude begins with openness to the world and a sense of wonder, a deep stirring feeling that begins inquiry. "The phenomenological attitude is sustained by wonder, attentiveness, and a desire for meaning" (van Manen, 2014, p. 220). Attentive awareness, a sense of wonder, suspension of taken-for-granted assumptions, and a

focus on prereflective experiences aid phenomenologists in their aim “[...] to make intelligible the experiences that we explore in a “feelingly understanding” manner” (p. 390). Rather than looking at theories and abstract terms, phenomenology deals with experience as it is lived, before it is reflected upon, to explore the meaning of phenomenon in everyday life. “Phenomenology aims to evoke the concrete meanings and sources of prereflective experience as we live it, from moment to moment, in our daily existence” (p. 66). To evoke meanings and experiences, phenomenologists use poetic and sensuous language. Sensuous language draws the reader into the lived moment and the nuances of the moment such that it can be felt, nearly experienced, through the words. The power of language is used “[...] to bring about pathic forms of knowledge and understanding that transcend the common cognitive function of language” (p. 243). Contact improvisation deals deeply with bodily ways of knowing and understanding; so, speaking to the lived experience of the nonverbal communication of consent in contact improvisation requires evoking noncognitive bodily knowing through poetic language that takes the reader beyond the cognitive toward meaning in the prereflective moment. Evocative poetic language, lived experiences, and the prereflective moment are at the heart of my phenomenological inquiry.

Lived experience is understood in phenomenology as “[...] that which presents itself directly – unmediated by thought or language” (van Manen, 2014). Lived experience occurs in the moment of experiencing, before thought or reflection. In contact improvisation, lived experience is each dancers’ experience of each moment within a dance as it is occurring. Nestled between the realization of what happened and the projection of what will happen next, lived experience is in the prereflective Now. Phenomenological inquiry has “[...] the intent to explore directly the originary or prereflective dimensions of human existence” (p. 57), making lived experience central. However, “[t]he problem is that the living moments of immediate experience [...] must

always be retrospectively retrieved as past of just past” (p. 59). Lived experience can never be directly described or conceptualized as it was experienced, and “[...] even the most evocative experiential description will fail to capture the fullness and subtleties of our experience as we live it.” (p. 54). However, phenomenology relies on evocative experiential descriptions of lived experience to reflect upon and stir the meaning of phenomena present in the descriptions. And so, as a researcher of human science phenomenology, I attempted to develop lived experience descriptions of dancers’ communications of nonverbal consent in contact improvisation.

The moment of the Now, or the prereflective moment, is central to the difficulties that phenomenologists face in their work: grasping a present moment; describing the moment without objectifying it; writing in an experiential, evocative, and analytic way (van Manen, Higgins, & van der Riet, 2016, p. 6); and “[...]evok[ing] understandings that otherwise lie beyond[...] reach” (van Manen, 2004, p. 715). The Now into which phenomenologists inquire, and in which lived experience resides, is always beyond reach as soon as it is reflected upon or described in words. “[...] [W]e are always in the ‘Now,’ and yet when we reflectively try to capture the ‘moment of the Now’ we are always too late.” (van Manen, Higgins, & van der Riet, 2016, p. 5) Phenomenological writing is an attempt to represent through words the Now, or that which “[...] escapes all representation” (van Manen, 2004, p. 718). Through evocative, sensuous representation, phenomenological research and writing brings the lived experiences and their meanings back to life to be explored. In my research, my aim was to evoke and represent in words participants’ lived experiences of nonverbal consent in contact improvisation in the prereflective moment.

French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1968), as well as the Merleau-Ponty scholar James Mensch (2009), position the body as important for being in and grasping the reality of the

world, for "[i]t is, in fact, through our bodies that we can grasp the world outside of ourselves *from within*" (Mensch, 2009, p. 7). The bridging and folding among the body and the world is what Merleau-Ponty refers to as "the flesh", not a literal physical skin, but "[...] an 'element' of Being" (p.139), a notion that upsets the assumptions of sensing and being sensed. Sensing and being sensed are inseparably entangled, as "[...]our body is a being of two leaves, from one side a thing among things and otherwise what sees them and touches them[...] it unites these two properties within itself" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 137). The interwoven nature of our bodies and the world are one instance of "intertwining", a way of "[...] overcoming the traditional, dualistic paradigm of our self understanding" (Mensch, 2009, p. 13). Bodies in contact improvisation are similarly overcoming the dualistic cartesian paradigm of body and mind, becoming bodies that are responsive to self and other. "[...] [T]he interpretations of touch offered by contact improvisation allow participants the possibility of constituting the body and self differently" (Novack, 1990, p. 172). How my body is felt in contact improvisation parallels this sensing and sensed understanding of intertwining and the flesh. In the body of this thesis, I borrow the term "intertwining" from Mensch (2009) when I speak to the dual quality of sensing and being sensed in one's own body within a contact improvisation dance.

"Intercorporeity" takes these notions of reversibility from the intertwining and the flesh, between the sensing and the sensed, and places them between bodies:

[...] if there is a relation of the visible with itself that traverses me and constitutes me as a seer, this circle which I do not form, which forms me, this coiling over of the visible upon the visible, can traverse, animate other bodies as well as my own
[...] If my left hand can touch my right hand while it palpates the tangibles, can touch it touching, can turn its palpation back upon it, why, when touching the hand

of another, would I not touch in it the same power to espouse the things that I have touched in my own? (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, pp. 140-41)

Contact improvisers reach toward each other, simultaneously touching and being touched, listening and being listened to, responding and responding to, in a dance that is always becoming - the dance that dances itself. *In this moment, I am within and without, touching and being touched, present to the weight and breath of our bodies, yet curiously observing the scene unfold (BW) (1).* In the act of invention, neither dancer leads nor follows, uncertain of the next moments and invested in the physicality that defines the form. Dancers embody Merleau-Ponty's (1968) notion of "intercorporeity" as they sense and are sensed by the other in a meeting of bodies, an improvised dance of co-creation.

The phenomenological lens that framed my research included the integral components of: attending to the phenomenological attitude; writing to represent meaning saturated phenomena through in-depth explorations and reflection; trying to capture the meaning and wonder in the Now; and, the necessity of the body in experiencing the world. The phenomenological notions of lived experience, the prereflective Now, intertwining, and intercorporeity, show themselves in my work. Through a phenomenological lens, I investigated the enactment of nonverbal consent within the context of contact improvisation.

3.2 Study Design

3.2.1 Overview

Following Behavioural Research Ethics Board (BREB) approval from the University of British Columbia (UBC), I conducted research in Vancouver, BC with four participants experienced contact improvisation dance. A video-recorded dance jam, written reflections, and

one-on-one interviews comprised the data collection phase of the study, in which I selected specific moments within the jam and elicited descriptions of these moments from the participants' own lived experiences. After transcription, triangulating the various sources of data, and member checking, I selected salient instances that arose during the jam and the interviews to describe and interpret. By layering the differing or coinciding lived experience of each participant, I developed a complex representation of nonverbal consent.

An overview of the study is as follows: (a) approval from BREB, (b) participant recruitment, (c) data collection stage 1: video-recorded jam, (d) self-reflection of all participants, including myself as researcher and participant, (e) review of video and participant reflections for interview, (f) data collection stage 2: interviews, (g) transcription of interviews, (h) triangulation and summaries for each interviewee, (i) member checking, (j) triangulation of all participants' experiences and selection of salient moments, (k) descriptive representation of findings through selected moments, and (l) reflection and interpretation. The following pages detail my research design in further detail.

3.2.2 Participants

Four participants explored with me how consent is negotiated nonverbally in contact improvisation, Emily, Michael, Nicole, and Satinder. All participants gave their written consent to take part in the study (see Appendix A for a sample consent form). They also all wished to be identified by name on any material published from the findings of the study. They indicated this by checking the box on page 3 of the consent form, which read, "Yes, I wish to be identified by name." By participating the study, participants had the opportunity to dance, talk about a movement form they enjoy, and contribute to research. Their input added to the current discussion around consent, both in CI and in the broader Canadian context.

Of the five participants, myself included, two were male and three were female. All participants were adults, with several decades of age between the youngest and oldest participants. Participants' experiences with CI varied in duration and intensity; however, all participants were regularly practicing the form at the time of study and had at minimum a year of experience, which included intense periods of studying the form.

My inclusion in the study as a participant as well as a researcher served multiple purposes. First, embodiment is integral to both phenomenology and contact improvisation, as such, participating within the study as both researcher and participant was key for connecting with the other participants and deepening my own bodily understanding of nonverbal consent within a CI jam. As a dancer, I feel that CI must be experienced to be truly understood, and I believe this extends to the communication of consent within the form as well. Everyone is different, feels and sees moments of consent differently, and brings themselves as a unique ingredient to a dance with endless possibilities. The possibilities of a dancer are constrained by the norms of the jam, as well as the norms of society, which impact how and to what individuals will consent in a given dance. With these complexities in mind, I quested for meaning and understanding from within and without, as a participant, dancer, and researcher, speaking and learning from my own experiences and communications of consent.

Second, van Manen (2014) describes "close observation" as similar, but different from, participant observations. The difference lies in how "[t]he method of close observation requires that one be a participant and an observer at the same time, that one maintains a certain orientation of reflectivity while guarding against the more manipulative and artificial attitude that a reflective attitude tends to insert in a social situation and relation" (p. 318). As a researcher, I could reflect upon the moments I observed or was part of, while fully participating with my fellow dancers. I

purposefully revisited the moments that caught my attention during the jam when reviewing the video and during interviews with participants.

Additionally, partaking in the jam instead of observing contributed to the “jam-like” atmosphere of the first stage of data collection. The camera impacted some dancers’ feelings of ease in the space, and an outside observing researcher would have intensified the impact. So, rather than being an outside observer, I was another dancer, facilitating and participating.

3.2.2.1 Recruitment and Involvement

Participants were recruited using online, convenience sampling. Participants self-selected to participate based on their interest and availability. I used online methods of recruitment because CI communities often communicate through the internet. Given my background as a CI dancer, I had connections to the Vancouver CI communities. I posted about recruitment for my research on the Vancouver-based Facebook pages: “Contact Improv Vancouver and British Columbia” and “Trout Lake Classes”.

After expressing their interest in this study, I further informed the potential participants about the study via email and arranged a time for all participants to jam. Following the jam, I discussed the next stage of the study with participants, one-on-one interviews. I conducted these interviews in the three weeks following the jam. My aim was to conduct interpretive research with a small number of experience-rich in-depth interviews. Through these interviews, the video-recorded jam, participant reflections, and personal reflections, I aimed to capture the meaning and wonder in the Now about which van Manen writes (van Manen, 2014; van Manen, Higgins, & van der Riet, 2016).

Following the interviews, I shared preliminary findings with the participants through individual member checks (Marshall & Rossman, 2016), which outlined their contributions to the study. Member checking is a contested practice, with authors and researchers such as Sarah Tracy (2013) preferring the phrase “member reflections”. Tracy writes that “[...] member reflections suggest that participant feedback is valuable not as a measure of validity, but as a space for additional insight and credibility [...]” (p. 238). Additionally, van Manen (2014) speaks to how member checking, as a measure of validity, is not part of phenomenological work; however, he says that

[...] it certainly is methodologically and ethically commendable to ask persons who have provided experiential descriptions (through interviews, written accounts, and so on) whether the examples or anecdotes derived from these experiential materials are resonant with their original experiences. But validating the quality of the experiential accounts or anecdotes does not validate the quality of the phenomenological study as a whole. (p. 348)

I considered these differing perspectives in the practice of what I refer to as “member checking”. I used member checking to see if I was representing participants’ original experiences well and to ask for reactions and further insights. Beyond member checks, any material published from this study, including and beyond this thesis, will be shared with the participants.

3.2.2.2 Ethics and Deception

Consent. Participants signed consent forms to participate in the study. In addition, I used verbal check-ins with participants about their consent to remain in the study throughout data collection.

Risks associated with practicing Contact Improvisation. Contact improvisation can involve physical and emotional risk. However, all participants were self-selected volunteers who are well-versed in the dance form and participate in CI outside of this study. They understood the risks associated with participating in CI and assumed them regularly and voluntarily on their own time.

Confidentiality. An important consideration in this study was maintaining participants' confidentiality to the best of my ability. The participants' personal information was kept secure and only researchers involved in this study had access to the collected data, in line with the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. However, only limited confidentiality could be offered to participants, because their identities could not be kept from one another. Participants had the option to remain anonymous or be identified in any material published from the study. All participants chose to be identified by name, and so, the researchers could not assure identity protection for participants, and the confidentiality of the participants' names was no longer an issue of concern.

Deception. In the initial recruitment posting, the follow-up email, and the consent form I used general language, avoiding the term 'consent', so as not to bias individuals' participation in the first stage of data collection. I informed the participants about my interest in "embodied communications and interactions in CI". After the jam and reflections on the jam were complete, I revealed the more specific interest of nonverbal communication of consent within a CI dance (see Appendix B for the deception script). This small act of deception was necessary because telling the participants the aim of the research might have influenced how they danced. Upon revealing the true interest of the study, I was met with interest and excitement by the participants. They understood through experience that, even without trying, words or any additional stimuli can

influence how we dance. I wanted to capture a jam, as realistic as possible, and see what we found as “consent” already occurring within that space.

3.2.3 Data Collection

Data collection involved three sources of data: a video-recorded jam, written reflections by participants about the jam, and interviews with participants. The data took the form of videos, voice recordings, written participant reflections, and written notes. The jam was the first stage of data collection.

3.2.3.1 Stage 1: Dance Jam

This stage of my research followed a common jam format, borrowing moments from a specific jam score called the Underscore. A jam in the CI context is a space in which dancers gather to practice the form and dance. The jam is open to anyone, dancers of any level, who want to dance CI. Jams do not have a teacher or instructor, but often have a facilitator. The facilitator’s role is to hold the space, which involves different responsibilities across different jams and contexts (for examples of jam guidelines see Contact Improv Calgary, 2018; Toronto Sunday Contact Improv, 2019). The jam differs from a class because it is an open space to practice the form, not guided by the instructions, directions, and exercises that contain a class or workshop. Without these containers, dancers in jams assume more responsibility because they co-structure their own experiences – entering, remaining in, and exiting dances of their own accord. This level of choice is the reason I focused on jam spaces - they hold more ambiguity and responsibility for individual decisions and negotiations of consent.

The Underscore is a jam score developed by Nancy Stark Smith through her teaching and practice of contact improvisation. The Underscore is known and practiced globally by CI dancers.

I borrowed two elements from the Underscore, “Assembly” and “Reflection/Harvest” (Smith, N.S., n.d.; Koteen, D. & Smith, N. S., 2009), to integrate the research process into the jam. The Assembly is an initial circle where dancers gather. In this circle, I reintroduced myself and my research, before guiding us into the jam. The Reflection/Harvest is time after the end of the jam for dancers to reflect on their experience. I provided writing material and asked participants to reflect on their experience of the jam. I collected these reflections before the closing circle, in which I debriefed the participants about the specific purpose of the research.

The jam took place in a small dance studio with a mirror. Although not regularly used for CI gatherings, the space was familiar to some participants. I placed two cameras in the room’s corners to capture the dancing from different angles. One of the cameras faced the room’s mirror, capturing yet another angle. I greeted participants as they entered the space, encouraging them to make themselves comfortable. When all participants were present, we gathered in a circle. In the Underscore this gathering would be called the Assembly. Often, CI gatherings begin in a circle to debrief. I reiterated the aim of the study, confirmed participant consent, asked about any injuries or specific needs, and answered questions. We then entered into an hour-long recorded jam with no music and minimal verbal conversation.

Within a jam, dancers embody Merleau-Ponty’s notion of intercorporeity (1968) and Mensch’s intertwining (2009). The dancers co-create through their bodily lived experiences, sensing and being sensed, touching and being touched. Through these lived moments of being in the world, dancers sensuously enact consent between and within their bodies. Consent is experienced in co-creation, moment-to-moment, and through beings moving and sensing themselves and one another. Consent in the jam was lived through the bodies of participants and

my own body. The experience of dancing together informed later stages of the research, through written reflections, video-recorded moments, and memory.

The video-recordings of the jam captured moments in which nonverbal communication and negotiation occurred, which were then used during the interview process and data analysis. Video is an appropriate format for data collection for several reasons: (1) I was looking at a movement form, which is ephemeral, so I used video to revisit moments that occurred during the jam; (2) I was participating in the jam and reflecting on my experience in the jam, therefore, I was not able to take observational notes on the jam while inside the space, instead, I used the video as a way to make secondary observations about the jam; (3) video has been an integral part of developing contact improvisation (see Novack, 1990), and, therefore, using video is not out of place within the form; and, (4) as noted by one participant during an interview, video provides an avenue not only for cognitive remembering, but for embodied remembrance. These bodily memories can bring back the sensations of being within the remembered moment, which is key for eliciting and describing lived experience.

The end of the dance was indicated by a quiet alarm. The alarm seemed startlingly loud after an hour of silence, broken only by noises of movement, laughter, and the occasional spoken word. After the alarm, we had time to find an end to our dances. I oriented the participants toward the reflection materials after the final dance concluded. For 20 minutes we cared for ourselves and reflected on the jam. This process of dedicated time for personal reflection before re-engaging with the other dancers is called the Reflection/Harvest in the Underscore. Everyone chose to reflect almost entirely in words, some in full sentences and others with a tapestry of singular words or phrases. We spoke to our overall experience of the jam, as well as describing moments that stood

out. The participants reflected with the understanding that I would collect and use their reflections in my research, during the interviews and for data analysis.

Following the 20-minute rest and reflection, we returned to a circle, the closing circle. Normally, participants are invited to share some of their reflections before we close the space. I asked everyone to share one word about their experiences, if they wished, to attempt to keep participants' experiences as individual as possible until after the interview processes. I also revealed the specific purpose of my research, to explore the nonverbal communication of consent in CI. Lastly, we ended the circle by discussing details about the interview stage of the research.

We concluded the first stage of data collection by sharing a light snack, where participants asked questions about the research and offered insight into their experiences in the jam. They noted how the camera, mirrors, and not knowing the specific purpose of the research affected their experience in the space. In total, the jam, including entering the space, reflections, and closing, took less than 2 hours.

After the jam, I reflected using guiding interview questions developed for the one-on-one interviews with participants. Self-reflection was necessary to try to capture my own experience of being in the Now, so that I entered interviews with participants having analysed my own personal experience. Then, I could return to my reflections and compare them to those of the participants, as I did with each participant's interview. Not only did I dive more deeply into my own experience through this reflection, I was also able to test the questions and interview process on myself before using them with participants.

After I reflected, I reviewed the video for moments when negotiation between participants seemed most apparent. I am curious about these moments of negotiation, because they are the

moments that carry embodied communication of consent. How are they experienced differently from person to person? With these moments identified, I looked to the participants' reflections. I located in the video instances from the dance that they described, with the intention of reviewing these instances during each individual's interview. The moments that struck the participants as interesting, or worthy of noticing, provided ground on which to begin our conversations.

3.2.3.2 Stage 2: Interviews

I scheduled individual interviews with each participant in the three weeks following the jam. The interviews took place in cafes most convenient for the participants. The interviews averaged around an hour and fifteen minutes in length. I recorded video and audio of the interviews for two purposes. First, to ensure I had a copy of the interview should anything happen to one recording (which, inevitably, it did). Second, as this study focuses on nonverbal and embodied communications, I cannot ignore those aspects of the interview. I anticipated that participants would use movement while discussing their experiences, so the video allowed me to return to participants' nonverbal cues and expressions. Like in the exploration of communicating consent in CI, "nonverbal signals are crucial to the meanings generated within interviews. Signals such as tone of voice and eye contact are rooted in the body; interviewer and interviewee adjust their communication from moment to moment in response to each other's cues" (Ellingson, 2017, p. 105). So, during the interview I considered Laura Ellingson's (p. 119) categories of nonverbal communication for embodied interviews: kinesics (body language), proxemics (space between people), vocalics (paralanguage – how we use our voice, including non-lexical sounds), haptics (touch), chronemics (use of time), appearance (chosen and unchosen aspects of physical features), territoriality (features of the physical location), and other potential nonverbal cues that arise during the interview process, such as expressive movement examples. These nonverbal features of

communication influenced the cadence of our conversations, the questions I asked, and how I asked them, both consciously and unconsciously.

My study used a phenomenological theoretical framework and methodology, so I drew from van Manen's (2014) writing about phenomenological interviews in *Phenomenology of Practice*. He wrote about things to keep in mind when doing phenomenological interviews, which included prompts such as: find a setting that feels right, develop a relationship with participants, avoid rushing the interview, keep it conversational, focus on experience, record the conversations, keep the main questions in mind, stay close to lived experience, look for rich and detailed experiential material, be patient, and do not be afraid of silence (pp. 314-17). I also took note of van Manen's (2014) two reminders for phenomenological interviews: (1) "Keep the phenomenological intent of the interview clearly in mind" and (2) "Try to obtain concrete stories of particular situations" (p. 316-17).

Along with my phenomenological lens, I drew from Ellingson's (2017) chapter on embodied interviewing to guide my interview process with participants. For example, I incorporated several practices for embodied interviewing by attending to my own body during the interview, attentively and actively listening, asking questions that evoke embodiment, inviting interviewees into their sensory experiences through memory, acknowledging participants' nonverbal cues, and paying attention to absence and silence in participants' communication (pp. 117-23). This attention to the body throughout the research process aided me in the task of working from an embodied place, bringing bodily knowing to the forefront of my inquiry.

Before each interview I reviewed the prompt materials – jam reflections and video clips – and used them to develop a unique interview script for each participant, which targeted specific moments from the jam (see Appendix C for interview questions and a sample interview script).

The questions developed for each interview worked to address my main research questions – (a) How is consent embodied and communicated nonverbally in a contact improvisation dance? (b) What do these communications look like and feel like? And, (c) how do the experiences of consent communication differ for dancers involved in the same moment of conflict or consent? - by providing direction for the more specific and sensuous questions I asked participants. For example, when exploring the question of how a participant embodies consent, I would address a particular moment in the video and ask: What is happening here? What does it feel like? Did you give consent? How did you do it? How did you understand the other giving, or not giving, consent? To understand more deeply the subtle textures of participants’ experiences, I would ask direct follow-up questions aimed to evoke the embodiment of the moment. In one interview, the participant mentioned a “safe texture” in a dance. I asked her to describe it more. “You said your body relaxes... what changes?” I also used what Ellingson (2017) refers to as a “clearing house” question at the end of the interview to gather participants’ final thoughts: “(e.g. What else is important to know about this topic? What haven’t we talked about yet on this topic that you think I need to know?)” (p. 104).

To begin the interviews, I asked participants about themselves and their experience with contact improvisation. Following this opening question, I invited the participants to remember the jam and if there were any moments that stood out to them, were worth noticing, or memorable, particularly in terms of consent. Often, the moments brought up were those indicated in their reflections; however, this was not always the case. The participants carried these moments in their body-mind to bring forth in the interview up to three weeks post-jam, indicating that these moments struck participants as important or relevant beyond other moments during the jam. Working from these highlights in participants’ experiences was beneficial, because we could speak

descriptively and sensuously of these moments. Often, the moments remembered by a participant were also in the video clips I had chosen for the participant, which allowed us to revisit them visually as well as through memory.

I used each individual's reflection to help them recall the jam and to inquire into their experiences. I asked about participants' internal sensations and the complexities of their experiences through their reflections before engaging with the external visual information video provides. The reflection-based discussions brought us more deeply into complexities surrounding moments of nonverbal communication, including initiation, the eyes, familiarity, awareness, and choice.

Following a discussion of their reflections, I used video clips from the jam to delve into the specifics of how consent was and is communicated in CI. The video clips served to spark participants' memories and provide an outside perspective on their experiences. I chose short clips of movement, involving what appears to me as a potential crisis or negotiation of consent, and I inquired about the participant's experiences: what is going on here? What did/does this feel like? Is how you see this now different than how it felt? I tried to use the same clips for both individuals involved, to investigate how their individual experiences within a single moment coincided or differed. However, some moments were more salient for some participants than for others, so I worked from the moments that were most memorable for each individual.

My own interview took the form of a free-write, going through the same stages described above, but in written rather than spoken form. I went through the interview-like free-writing process before interviewing any participants. I added questions and answered them after interviewing all participants. The questions I added were based on specific moments that arose during the interviews with participants, which addressed parts of the jam in which I participated.

In the end, sixteen moments from the jam were discussed among the five participants. Not all sixteen moments are fully represented in this text. I chose the moments which elicited the most interest and experiential description from participants, and the moments which exemplified the tensions inherent within lived experiences of communicating nonverbal consent in contact improvisation.

3.2.4 Analysis and Representation

Data analysis took place throughout the data collection process, reviewing the videos and reflections prior to the interviews, and after the final interview and member checking. I used NVivo to organize the collected data. I looked to van Manen (2014) to guide how I thought, reflected, and wrote throughout the data analysis process. I endeavoured to maintain an attentive awareness of the phenomenality of each moment under consideration and create a lived sense of each experience through language. “The voking features of a text have to do with the recognition that a text can “speak” to us, that we may experience an emotional and ethical responsiveness, that we may know ourselves addressed” (p. 240-41). The poetic language used within my writing and analysis aims to evoke the lived experience of nonverbal consent explored with the participants, an attempt to capture and arouse for the reader the complexity and sensuality of these lived and embodied moments of Now.

To begin post-interview analysis, I transcribed, reviewed, and condensed each interview into a three-to-five-page document. Each document was sent to the respective interviewee. The compiled document was a summary of each participant’s contribution to the project. To develop the summaries for each participant, I went through the “[...] complex and creative process of insightful invention, discovery, and disclosure” (van Manen, 2014, p. 320) that is analysing thematic meanings of the phenomenon. Most prevalent was the selective reading approach (p. 320)

whereby I read the interviews and reflections and watched the video multiple times. I highlighted and made notes of statements and moments that seemed particularly essential to the phenomenon of nonverbal consent. I pulled together the congruent ideas, as well as building a short description of each video moment. I also sent participants a version of the lived experience descriptions that I developed and used in this thesis (see chapters 1, 4, 5, and 6). This summary sheet aided in data analysis – triangulating the different data sources – and was used for member checking. I asked participants to review their summary to see if the descriptions were resonant with their experiences and to ask them for any reactions and further insights.

I used triangulation to bring together the multiple sources of data across the participants' experiences and create a tapestry of experience for understanding how consent is nonverbally embodied and communicated. The moments I chose to describe were those discussed during the interviews with participants. These moments took the form of lived experience descriptions, which I built from the videos, reflections, and interviews gathered during data collection. I began with individual paragraphs derived from each of the three sources. I pulled words and phrases from the reflections and interviews, sometimes changing them slightly to provide the same tone that the participant expressed when being interviewed. I collected the words and phrases that spoke to prereflective experience, looking to avoid perceptions, opinions, and views, which "[...] are only helpful to the extent that they lead or give access to the lived experiences that lie behind these opinions, perceptions, or beliefs" (van Manen, 2014, p. 300). I wrote in present tense and in first person, to help make each story more vivid (p. 255). Additionally, I created visual, spatial descriptions using the video clips shown to participants, so that the moments might more easily be visualized by the reader. To meld these three sources of data - videos, reflections, and interviews – I brought the paragraphs together, creating one fluid story for each individual's experience. I

attempted to capture and gain an in-depth insight into the participants' unique experience of nonverbal consent in contact improvisation by choosing words and sentences that captured the texture and nuances of the moment. The poetic and sensuous language in the descriptions aim to evoke experience. The power of evocative description is that it can help bring to light the nuances and complex aspects of a phenomenon that are difficult to describe in concrete, theoretical terms; instead, the descriptions create a sense of "feeling understanding" (p. 249).

The process of building lived experience descriptions was greatly aided by my roles as researcher and participant. As a researcher dancing, my participation in the jam was impacted by my knowledge of the topic and awareness of the research, which allowed me to notice potential moments of consent during the jam. I returned to these moments when reviewing the video, during the interviews, and when developing lived experience descriptions. As a dancer researching, I drew on my previous knowledge, experiences, and conversations throughout the process. When developing the lived experience descriptions, the poetic voice I used to write and modify participants' words, to draw out the nuances of their lived experiences, came from my own experiences. I empathized bodily, drawing from my own experiential knowledge of similar situations. As a participant in my own research, I had the unique opportunity of being part of the experiences discussed by participants. Not only did this aid in enriching my relationship with participants, but it helped me to dive more deeply into moments, ask more specific questions, and write from my own experience in the research. Additionally, participants surprised me by helping me find new insights through experiences I have not yet had myself; for example, dancing as a heavier, male dancer being support by or lifting a lighter female dancer. My experience of being a participant shaped my analysis by allowing fluidity between my firsthand knowledge of dancing CI, attentiveness to my research questions, and shared experiences with participants; which, in

turn, influenced how I created and wrote the lived experience description shared in the following chapters.

After creating lived experience descriptions for each moment and each participant, I brought the descriptions together and layered them in such a way that the story unfolds from two or three perspectives at once. These layered perspectives, shown in chapters 4, 5, and 6, display the tension inherent in the embodied and nonverbal communication of consent and allow the comparison of different dancers' experiences of the same moment. In chapter 7, I explored these tensions. I compared the experiences of the participants to see how they embodied consent nonverbally in their contact improvisation dances and how these experiences coincided or diverged in moments of shared negotiation.

4. Beginning and Ending

Beginnings and endings are moments for enacting consent. To start a dance, it must be initiated, so an offer must be received and accepted or refused. To finish a dance, the connection between the two dancers must be broken and communication stopped, whether that means both consent to end the dance or one dancer withdraws their consent. Dancers begin and end dances in various ways for various reasons. Sections 4.1 and 4.2 exemplify one beginning and one ending among numerous possibilities.

The following sections include story-like descriptions of the dancers' lived experiences. After the experiences, I briefly discuss why each moment is relevant to the nonverbal communication of consent. Nuances influencing how consent is nonverbally communicated are present in each example, and I discuss them in more detail in chapter 7.

4.1 A Beginning

A beginning to a dance. Three dancers. Two females and one male. Brynn, Satinder, and Nicole. They dance without physical contact. The dance is one of learning, building, and playing. The dancers experience the moment as a puzzle-like game of meeting and connecting.

I place my hand on the cool floor of the dance studio. I feel mischievously playful, aware that with this final, confident, placement I mirror your body as it faces mine. This is my offering to you. Three of us sit here. We form a triangle on the floor, with hands placed into the centre and fingers spread, sensing the ground as if it is another skin. We wait. The wait is not impatient but energized. Your response is deliberate, and the game begins. (BW)

I am sitting, observing, and I watch you join me. Our hands meet in the middle. (SK)

I join you both, placing my hand among yours. Sliding and moving, we play a game of negative space, making and taking decisions and giving pause for others to respond and react. This feels natural, a child's mind-set, learning and connecting. (NJ)

Eyes read bodies and faces. We begin with our hands, but quickly our feet get involved. A smile lights my lips as we play, offering, pause, receiving, and offering again. The sound of feet and limbs sliding across the floor reaches my ears. Entering and exiting. A question proposed and answered. Curiosity. We don't touch, or at least not in a way that is part of the game. (BW)

Watching forms and faces. We are trio of hands and feet, limbs and bodies meeting without touching. Compositional play. This is our dance of learning, learning about each other and to dance with one another. I am conscious of your movements, even though we are not touching. (SK)

We are not in contact. I make myself available to be here. I choose to stay in this moment. We move closer. It is about listening, sensing the space, and finding a place of common ground. I don't feel like anyone is trying to overpower anyone else. Mimicry evolves into the play of meeting each other, being available, listening, and reacting. I'm listening to your decisions and letting them influence my decisions. (NJ)

We move closer and closer. I brush your foot and leg, but the confines of our negative-space-trio keep us from acknowledging the small, unintentional touches. I feel a bit guilty for these moments of unintentional touch, like I am ruining the game. But, as it continues, it expands, and we contract, coming closer and closer in proximity until the moment of touch. (BW)

Our hands and feet are giving and taking consent in this puzzle. I am standing now. I step back from your bodies, but then return, allowing your hip to sink into me. (SK)

When a change is offered, I react to that as well. My hips are in the air, legs stretched straight and head pointed toward the ground. My momentum is slowly taking me backward, until I connect with your leg. (NJ)

I see it happen before I join. I watch the moment of contact occur. Two bodies connecting and changing the game. I'm a bit sad that it ended. I wanted it to last longer. The play of the in-between space is lost to another structure, contact improvisation. The eyes are no longer so vital, as I now see you through my skin. The point between us guides this introductory, meeting dance. (BW)

In this trio, the dancers met face-to-face for the first time in the jam. The participants expressed how initiating or beginning a dance can be a challenge, because uncertainty may arise. The uncertainty comes from lack of clarity: *Am I making it clear that I want to dance with them? Are they not responding because they don't want to dance now, for the entire jam, or are they still warming up?* In the case of this trio, the offer and acceptance were clear.

The initiation of the dance happened through mimicry, or mirroring, the copying of one person's position and movement by the others. The initial mimicry led the dancers into a game of negative space, slowly closing the space between them until they touched. Through the game, the dancers started to get to know one another and develop the energy and style of their dance. Not all dances begin with mirroring. Other ways a dance could begin include making eye contact, testing proximity, through an accidental bump, a deliberate choice to enter an already occurring dance, or a verbal ask. In this case, the mimicry allowed the dancers to continuously offer, wait, listen, and respond, building trust and confirming their consent to continue.

The dancers experienced this moment differently, although they all saw the moment as one of connecting and playing using hands and feet, a beginning. One dancer expressed guilt and sadness in this experience of play, because she was unintentionally 'breaking the rules' of the game and then wished it could have lasted longer. Another dancer focused on seeing, observing, and learning. The third dancer focused on listening, sensing, and meeting, the ways the dancers made decisions and stayed available.

4.2 An Ending

An ending of a dance. Two dancers. One female and one male. Emily and Satinder. The dance is playful and quick. The end of the dance is abrupt, with consent withdrawn.

I'm swirling you around on the floor, using our connected arms and momentum to allow you to spin on your back. You pull yourself to me and then push on my upper back. Playful and then roughly.

I do not like this. Forceful energy. You are pushing me down and I resist, still staying on my feet. I have your arms again. I swirl you around on the

floor and then let go. For a moment I break free. I jump away, putting physical distance between us. You chase after me as I jump away. You reach to try to catch me, but you miss. No. I move away.

This is the end of our dance. (EB)

Only one voice is present in this duet, because the dancer spoke about the moment after I had interviewed her partner. I chose to include this moment anyway because it shows how consent can be unilaterally withdrawn in a contact improvisation dance. The dancer physically removed herself from the dance after experiencing an uncomfortable moment with her partner. She did not appreciate the shift in intention, from a playful dance to a rough and forceful one, and she made this clear by separating from her partner and leaving the dance.

Not all dances end with withdrawal of consent. Some dances end consensually, with both partners feeling the ending. Other dances might end with one partner leaving, with both partners in stillness, with a new individual joining the dance, mimicry, a verbal thank you, or the conclusion of the jam. Endings are ripe for nuances in how consent is communicated, because, like beginnings, they require signification.

Nuances of consent are illuminated not only during beginnings and ends, but also in moments of negotiation. Negotiations might occur because of miscommunication, confusion, uncertainty, lack of clarity, or differing intentions. The negotiations occur in the midst of play, with dancers communicating their ways through challenging and sometimes risky situations.

5. Risk and Play

Contact improvisation is often described as playing. Participants spoke to the child-like or organic nature of play in contact improvisation. Like children on a playground, we invent, proposing new games, revisiting old ones, building worlds and exploring them together. These games might invite us into risky or acrobatic play, using speed, momentum, height, and our bodies' physical capabilities to expand the possibilities of the dance. Trust, safety, and communication background such play and come to the forefront when moments of conflict or negotiation arise. Sections 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, and 5.4 highlight four playful or risky instances of negotiation. All four moments occurred within a dance. The partners experienced the conflict, worked through it, and then continued to dance.

5.1 Providing Direction

A moment of providing direction. Three dancers. Two in conflict. One female and one male. Nicole and Satinder. The dance is on the floor and moves steadily. Discomfort arises and is dispelled.

My forearm is pressing into your forehead. You push your head down and through my arm until it comes to my torso. I move backward to a sitting position, and I feel another's body behind me. I rest my upper body against his surface.

(NJ)

Your forearm is connected to my head. I push my head toward you and bring it to your stomach. I roll my head up the front of your body. (SK)

You are rolling your head up the front of my body as I sit. If you keep moving in the direction you are going, you will roll over my face. I don't want you to squash my face. It's coming. As your head moves closer, my face scrunches in discomfort and I turn my head slightly. My face is here. Don't go that way! I use my right hand to redirect your head. Clear pressure and direction. I push on your head so that it comes to my shoulder instead. (NJ)

My head comes to your shoulder. We are back to back for a moment, with another's head and upper body between us. A small rest with my head on your shoulder. (SK)

Thank you. (NJ)

One dancer saw a moment of discomfort arising and directed her partner's head to her shoulder using her hand. The other dancer did not realize the discomfort he was about to cause or fully register the shift in direction. This instance shows how dancers' experiences of the same instances can be drastically different. The dancers' differing experiences are further explored in section 7.3. This moment also displays how consent, refused or accepted, can be communicated and received bodily, before or without registering the consent through thought.

5.2 Conflicting Intentions

A moment of conflicting intentions. Two dancers. One female and one male. Nicole and Michael. The dance is trusting and acrobatic. The dancers have different intentions for proceeding.

I balance on your back in a spiral, just a few feet off the floor. My arms and head extend out and down to the floor on your left. I reach my head and arms under your left arm, arching my spine. I support the weight of my body on my hands

and slide my hips off your back. You reach your left arm behind you, holding my hip and keeping me on your back. My left leg is above me, following the arch of my back. I want to go down to the floor, but your hand is stopping me. Is my intention unclear? (NJ)

I am on my hands and knees. You are balanced on my back. Enjoying the subtle interplay of weight, your back to mine. I want more of this. I don't want the play between our backs to stop. I feel you begin to slide under my left arm and off my left side. I reach my left arm behind me and around your hip. Don't bail yet. This is fun. (MD)

Are you trying to keep me safe? I want to do this, and I can. You shuffle your body toward me, keeping your hand on my hip. In the weight change, I curve my spine in the opposite direction for a moment. Miscommunication. A giggle escapes me amidst the struggle. (NJ)

I place my hand on your hip, gently stopping you from falling. I feel you try to go toward your head and to the ground, but I want to go the other way. No, don't go that way. I use my hand and shuffle closer to you to keep our centres aligned. (MD)

I try to arch again, but then bring my left foot down to the floor. Our intentions compete, yours trying to keep me up and mine trying to go down to the ground. I concede, following the momentum that takes me in the opposite direction, onto my feet. (NJ)

I feel you shift your weight and tuck your head, making me feel that you will go the other direction with me. I commit. I straighten my upper body, perpendicular to the floor, with my hand still on your hip. I move, taking you with me. Committed to my idea regardless of feedback, I don't take note of the arch that returned to your back, stating that you wanted to keep going toward your hands.

(MD)

In this duet, the dancers were familiar with one another and had engaged in similarly acrobatic and playful dances before. The top dancer wanted to go to the floor on her hands, but the bottom dancer had different intentions. He wanted her to stay on his back and then come to her feet. They struggled to negotiate, and a shift in weight caused the top dancer to change her body position. The bottom dancer took her change to signify willingness to follow his intended movement.

This dance exemplifies miscommunication and competing intentions, as well as the impact of weight and body position on nonverbal communication. It also draws attention to the notions of gender and power and their potential impact on consent in contact improvisation. Both dancers enjoyed this dance and saw no harm in this instance of negotiation.

5.3 Questioning Lift

A moment of questioning a lift. Two dancers. One male and one female. Michael and Brynn. The duet is quick, playful, and a little mischievous. One dancer picks up the other dancer, later questioning whether or not he should have lifted her.

My palm is up. We have been playing, swiftly and energetically. You gently place your hand on mine. You take it away. I flip my hand over, and then return it to

palm up. You slap again. A third time you try, and I move my hand, attempting to catch yours instead. (MD)

The feeling of trying to catch each other off guard. I try to slap the palm of your hand, as you offer it playfully and then take it away, first letting me hit it, flipping it over, and then moving it and trying to catch my hand. (BW)

We laugh as we rotate around one another. I catch you in my arms and lift you off the ground. (MD)

I am still connected to you at the torso, but our focus is on our hands. I laugh. Like to children, we play. We rotate around the contact point at our centers, and then I feel your arms wrap around my waist and your intention to move me upward. I want up too! (BW)

This is not an offer. I muscle you up. You are so light! (MD)

You lift me up and spin me around. I push down into your shoulder, through your structure to make myself light and ease some of the burden off your arms. I reach my legs long and extend my body, trying to make myself light and easy to carry. I'm excited. I want to fly! We spin and you slowly lower me down, until I touch the ground and fall. You fall with me. Our play continues. (BW)

Is this all right for you? Why am I lifting instead of offering a ride? What made me do that? We spin. Slowly, I lower you to the ground. You fall and I follow. (MD)

The dance was playful and energetic, with both dancers feeding into the energy and intention of the dance. The dancers were familiar with one another, but they had not danced together for a year. Familiarity and the duration they had been dancing in the jam influenced how they co-created their dance.

One dancer questioned whether or not he should have lifted the other dancer. His question was one about consent and the underlying power and gender dynamics of a large man picking up a small woman. She did not mind being lifted. She viewed the lift as part of their play and assisted him, displaying how use of weight and body position can be indicators of consent.

5.4 Concerning Doubt

A moment concerning doubt. Two dancers. One female and one male. Brynn and Michael. They dance slowly and exploratorily. The smaller dancer supports the larger dancer. They share a sense of stability followed by doubt.

I stand curled over you. I have my arms under you and then switch them to above, helping and guiding you onto my legs. I welcome this taking of weight. I feel the point of our connection slowly moving up my thighs from my knees. Your entire body weight is rested on the bones of my lower legs. I'm surprised and excited to hold you in this way. (BW)

I am half supported by your thighs, and half supported on my limbs, fingers and toes touching the ground. I roll up your legs and reach my other arm to your back, helping you to support my movement upward and toward you. My weight is entirely supported by you. I feel safe, yet I am aware of my heavier weight on your smaller body. (MD)

I feel that if you continue to roll toward my center of gravity, I can continue to support you, and perhaps even bring you to standing. Stable and confident. You pause. I panic. My trust in myself falters. Can I actually hold you here? My chest contracts and I stop breathing. A moment of doubt, confusion, and uncertainty. Stay in it, I say to myself, this is part of the game. I straighten my back, trying to maintain balance, with my hands still holding you for safety. (BW)

I see another dancer near, she seems to offer a ledge. I let my left arm go and extend backward, reaching myself and my head toward another's shoulder, while remaining supported by you. She may have seen something I didn't. (MD)

Continuing in this moment is for safety only, the safety of you and others. You are much bigger than me. I cannot hold you in this way if you pause or roll down. Continue coming toward me, I try to say to you through my touch. By offering slight variations in pressure, I try to indicate that you should speed up or change the decision to pause, but I am not clear in myself as to the direction, and not clear to you, I think. I cannot let you drop, for your safety and the safety of the dancers beneath us. I try in various places and ways. I don't know how to communicate my need and intention clearly. I don't feel listened to. I'm afraid to drop you, to fall, to hurt myself, or you, or someone else. Time expands, mere seconds becoming minutes, as I watch you reach to her and as she slips away from underneath you. I came to expect you to move with her, away from me. A moment of doubt about whether I can support your weight or not. I hold on, no longer comfortable with your weight on me. (BW)

A moment of doubt. Uncertainty. Are you able to take my full weight? Conscious of being heavier than most dancers, I move toward her, but she moves away, giggling, when I try to reach to her. A moment of confusion. What do I do now? Not abandoning the perch on your thighs, I return to you, rolling again up your legs, my feet reaching for the floor. I rotate quickly, spiralling up and toward your center. I throw myself into you and off balance. One quick weight shift and then another, bigger one. You stumble but catch us. We regain our footing, both of us standing, and we continue to dance. (MD)

I am on the edge of being able to support you. When you move toward me again, you move quickly. I brace myself and push my weight into you as you spiral forcefully into me. I stumble backward as I'm set off balance, but I catch both of us by leaning and pushing into you. You come to standing. I'm glad you moved toward me again, as I was not sure how to get out of the predicament in another way. This is the direction I wanted you to go, but we could have done it slowly and easefully. I feel relieved. No one is hurt. The tone of our dance has changed for me. (BW)

Weight, safety, and uncertainty were at the heart of this moment of negotiation. The smaller dancer supported the larger dancer on her legs, while in close proximity to other dancers in the room. Both dancers began by feeling stable and confident, trusting the support. Doubt arose with a pause, and with it, concerns about safety. The supported dancer expressed concerns about the smaller dancer holding his weight, which led him to reach for a second support. However, when the offered support evaporated, he returned to his original partner, trusting solely in her to help him stand. His attention was on finding more support. In looking for more support, the larger

dancer compromised his support. The supporting dancer lost confidence when she felt the larger dancer pause. The smaller dancer's consent wavered in the face of doubt, but her concern for everyone's safety kept her engaged. She tried to communicate nonverbally but felt as though her communications were unclear or ignored.

This negotiation through uncertainty showed how nuances and minor changes have large impacts on individuals' lived experiences. Both dancers felt uncertainty in their communication and attempted to address the uncertainty in different ways. The dancers' different experiences of this moment are further explored in section 7.3. Moments of uncertainty and negotiation of consent occur not only in risk and play, but also in stillness and intimacy.

6. Stillness and Intimacy

When we view something from the outside, it does not hold the same textures, intentions, and sensations of being within. In a moment of stillness, connected center to center with another human being, we can feel differences dependant upon variations in context. Two salient moments involving stillness arose during discussions with participants. These moments held similar but distinct textures, and they were compared by one participant who was present in both. All three participants involved brought these instances into the interview as noteworthy. In the following pages, two duets are described from the perspective of the participants and discussed in term of their relationship to consent in CI. Through body memory, dancers recalled these moments, where they were within themselves, with their partners, and in the space.

6.1 A Lying Stillness

A lying stillness. Five dancers. Two males and three females. The movement is slow with careful listening and stillness. The dance takes place in the middle of the jam. Within the quintet, two dancers lie still together. One male and one female. Satinder and Emily. This duet reveals the final two perspectives of the quintet described in the Introduction (see chapter 1). Uncertainty lies in their stillness.

I lie face down. My feet follow some of the movement, participating, but my body lies still. This is what is seen, but it is not remembered. What is felt?

You rest on my lower back in a comfortable way. We lay here for a long time. Breathing. I focus on the point of contact between us, and cannot help but consider... I am uncertain about how you feel in this moment. I am comfortable

and willing, I am not resisting, but it raises the question of consent in my mind.

There is nothing that I am doing to indicate that I might not consent. (SK)

I rest with my stomach on your lower back. I feel comfortable here. I would move my feet if I did not like it here. No anxiety or stress. I could stay here for a long time, but part of me, my thoughts, are poised to move. Is this okay for you? My body is relaxed, but there is a question in the energy of our dance that keeps me from fully being here. I'm really liking this, but I'm not a hundred percent sure that you feel comfortable here too. I feel that at any moment you might decide to shift, and this easeful moment of stillness will be over. (EB)

Somewhere between the touch and being still a question emerges. Stillness is different than moving. It is a circumstantial choice. I choose to be still, and you choose to be still. I could move and the dance will keep going. It is intimate. I feel it is more intimate being still and touching someone than moving fast and touching. When I am still, I feel more than when I am moving fast. I feel different things in different states. When I am still, I have my focus on one point. When I am in movement, my focus is in many places. I am moving, I am taking care of my own body, I am being in the air. (SK)

Stillness lacking clarity. I like dancing like this. I do not know if this is the kind of dance you like. We've never danced like this before. This is our first moment of sustained stillness. Is it in our range? I don't quite understand you or know you yet. I catch myself projecting your experience. Are you happy? Unhappy? Is this what you want in this dance? I'm not sure where you are in the world. I feel your physical body here with me, but not your whole being. I do not feel the "us"

in the dance, the third dancer. I feel myself dancing with you. Are you here with me? Uncertainty. Are we together in this dance? Like an itch I cannot find, I sense a missing piece of communication that would let me know that we are in the same place, that we have tracked to the same point. (EB)

Laying for ten or twenty seconds with no purposeful movement is a style, I guess, a feeling of comfort in another's space. We have not danced much, although we have known each other for a while. This dance between us is more about learning who you are, the way you dance, and how you are feeling. Each person has their own ways of doing and dancing. This dance was meaningful to me, but it suggests to me the idea of consent, this stillness, much more than a faster dance. A small turn of my head initiates a group shift, but we remain, continuing to lie together in this way on the floor. (SK)

You are probably going to move. You are probably going to move. You are probably going to move. I am fine if you move, but I am fully in this moment of rest until that happens. Is it okay for me to fully enjoy this moment, without wondering where you are at? A small shift in you brings a shift in me. I do not fully know that you would be content to lay here for a long time. Finding a more comfortable position, we rest again. (EB)

Both dancers consented to be in stillness together; however, they shared a sense of uncertainty about the moment as well. One was uncertain about the intimacy within the stillness, and the other was uncertain about the willingness and intention of the other dancer. Both dancers enjoyed the dance, despite their hesitations.

In this moment, questions and uncertainty called attention to the familiarity and deep listening between the dancers, as well as the implications for gender, intimacy, and norms in contact improvisation and consent. The dancers listened deeply and intently, learning about and from one another, but finding ambiguity and questioning within their sensitivity.

6.2 A Standing Stillness

A standing stillness. Two dancers. Both female. Brynn and Emily. The dance is slow, nearly still, and lasts for ten minutes. The dance takes place near the end of the jam. The two dancers' lived experiences converge and coincide. Their communication of consent is clear and constant.

My eyes are open. I look through the windows at the busy streets below, observing the cityscape, contemplating time, and slowly reaching my arm upward. I had an itching, an impulse, not a necessity but a wish of my body, to reach upward while reaching into you. It feels like the beginning of a long dance.

(BW)

My eyes are closed. My experience is internal. My hands rest on my stomach. I stand with you, finding comfort in slowness. If I were to speak out loud right now I would say 'stay', but I don't say it. You stay. I notice the way I allow my body to want what it wants, almost stillness - leaning into the soft, sturdy support of another. This dance is intimate. I feel grateful for the chance to listen deeply to the minute nuances of our touch. I'm not attached to you staying, but I do have a preference for it. (EB)

I expand myself while tuning into our dance. Fingers unfurling slowly. Most of my awareness is with you, and how my movement changes the connection between us. Careful communication and intense listening. Patience. Breath. Like a moment of pause after chaos, just feeling. My fingers close my hand into a fist and it slowly drops. The clock on the wall catches my attention. It is okay. Just dance. (BW)

I feel like every single movement is felt and responded to. Presence. A feeling of awake-ness in a relaxed way. Physiological sensations. Calm. Peace. Comfort. Safety. My hands drop to my sides. Breath, moving with more ease and depth than in the beginning. I feel the floor through you. I feel curious about the physics and simplicity of this support. What happens when weight is shared briefly, barely in the hips and maintained in the shoulders - what adjusts? How much? How little? How my bones stack. How they adapt to the shifts in your bones. How I don't have any agenda of where in the room to be or any other movements. Only the intention of, 'how do I maintain this ease in my body?' (EB)

Part of me has still been waiting, expecting and uncertain about if this is our dance or where the dance will go. Slowly inching our weight. The pressure of resting. Do you want to be here? Do you want to be here with me? This feeling ends as my arms release at my side. Oh, you do.

I feel us sink into ourselves, into and through each others' body, so that it feels like neither initiate. I want to be here with you too. A racing mind settles. I feel the point between us roll from my shoulder blade down our backs. Such

satisfaction I find in this movement that comes from our being with one another and gravity. I am certain about this dance. (BW)

Like a bodily sigh, I realize we both want to be here. Something in me relaxes. No ideas about flying or taking to the ground, just that thought of 'I like it here, in this, right now.' Saying somehow, 'thank you'. Thank you for letting me lean on you. Thank you for providing me a place to rest and just be. Insight beyond the dance and into familial relations surfaces. It is time to connect. Consent is clear. (EB)

A whisper so clear it could be a shout. There is no mistaking what is being said between us. We agree to be in this intimate moment together. The consent is not only in the physicality of our dance, but in who I choose to be with in this intimate, quieter, more vulnerable space. You feel familiar. I am comfortable here. I could stay here indefinitely. Our consent is in our mutual agreement about the state, the energy, and the intention of the dance. We are consenting to stay with each other in each moment, this near stillness filled with possibilities and listening. I understand your consent through your responsiveness to our movements and how you stay with me in the moment. Sensing, always sensing, yet not initiating change. Mutual yes's in the texture of the dance unfolding. Consent through stillness, a lack of movement, an indication of continuation. Continued consent. A sense of not needing to do anything else, being content in the moment. In each moment.

We move slowly, standing back to back. Most of the time we are moving so incrementally, it almost looks still. But it does not feel still. Between our backs is a world alive with possibilities and creation, a microcosm of movement, of colour and life. My skin meets yours through the layers of our clothing, and I feel your breath expand and contract. Warmth. Pressure. The ever-present

interactions between our bodies and the physical force of gravity. Even within our stillness we dance. Is there ever a moment that is truly still?

A small dance. The dance between our bodies and gravity does not feel like an offer or ask from either one of us; instead, a continuous question, continuously answered. But, no questioning of our willingness to be here. A resting dance. My feet move a tiny bit to accommodate for the smallest weight shift, so that my bones feel totally stable. Minute wavers and subtle shifts in our bodies, but no uncertainty. The point of contact moves between us in such a way that no decisions felt made, only followed. The wavers and shifts are our dance, and I feel you feel them. We are guided by the physical, dropping into a state of surrender and ease. Subtle choices that create further ease and comfort have a ripple effect until they settle. We are content here, feeling and following, joined together and invested in the dance. We are in it together, not just two people touching in our own worlds. Your whole being is here, meeting mine. We follow the path as it is simultaneously created. Willingly walking forward into the unknown. (EB, BW)

Like the stillness in 6.1, the dancers began with some uncertainty; however, uncertainty dissolved leaving clear, open, and continuous communication in its place. This dance exemplifies moment-to-moment micro-movements in a dance and the continuous consent embedded within them.

In the beginning, the dancers' awareness differed. One dancer attended to the room and the space beyond the room, as well as her own sensations and her partner. The other dancer kept her awareness internal and within the subtle communications between her and her partner. Eventually, the dancers' lived experiences so closely resembled each other that I wrote them as one. This sense of oneness, flow, or the dance that dances itself, happened in a moment of shared intention, attention, and consent.

I was one of the dancers in this standing dance. When discussing it in the interview, we did not need to say much, because we both knew what we both felt. But in sharing, the bliss and ease of the dance we shared spilled forth. The other dancer recounted:

You know when you meet somebody, who you like talking to and they like talking to you, and then there's that moment of acknowledgement, where you're like, oh my god! We should hang out again! It's this really giddy, kind of vulnerable, but excited feeling. It's kind of how I feel we're talking about it. We both wanted to do that! It's some really rich experience in life, I think, even if it's super subtle. Just feeling like this person wants to be here just as much as I do. It's almost the best feeling. The most relaxed feeling for me in my life, and excited, is that feeling of the approval is just there. (EB)

In the following chapter, I dive more deeply into the nuances that contribute to how the communication of nonverbal consent is experienced in contact improvisation. I use the descriptions from chapters 4, 5, and 6 in the discussion to further demonstrate the complexity of consent as it is experienced from partner to partner and moment to moment.

7. Discussion: Nuances of Consent

The following three sections discuss the three questions at the heart of my study. The first section explores how consent is embodied and communicated nonverbally in a contact improvisation dance. I speak to the title of my thesis, “Nuances of Touch”, the embodiment of consent beyond touch, and I use Kleinig’s (2010) conditions of consent as a backdrop for exploring how consent might be conceptualized in CI. Second, I address what nonverbal communications of consent look and feel like in CI. I refer to descriptions from chapters 1, 5, and 6 to revisit and dive more deeply into the lived experience of consent from my perspective as both researcher and participant. In this section I also revisit the phenomenological notions of lived experience, the moment of the Now, intertwining, and intercorporeity. I take time to make more explicit how these concepts are relevant and embedded in my work. The final question into which I inquire aims to expose how experiences of consent differ for dancers involved in the same moment of conflict or consent. Two instances from chapter five serve as examples as I compare and describe dancers’ lived experiences. Together, the following sections begin to illustrate the complexities of nonverbally communicating consent in contact improvisation.

7.1 Embodying and Communicating Consent

7.1.1 Nuances of Touch

I began my inquiry by asking how consent is embodied and communicated nonverbally in a contact improvisation dance. Most obviously, this question evokes the title of this thesis, “Nuances of Touch”. Touch is the primary line of communication in contact improvisation. It is the most common answer to the *how* of communication in contact improvisation. Through touch, dancers listen and respond through their skin, reflexive and intentional movements of their bodies,

and the force of gravity. The communications are subtle and vary. The variations in nuance impact dancers' communication from partner to partner and moment to moment. For example, a fraction of a moment of pause before proceeding to lift another dancer might give the other dancer time to respond in consent by shifting their weight in such a way that they are lighter to lift. In another instance, that fraction of pause might indicate a hesitation to lift or an uncertainty about carrying someone's weight. Touch is not unilateral. Weight, intention, and position are some of the nuances that impact how touch communicates consent and is experienced in CI. For example, Keogh (2018) writes about how to say no when a dancer does not want to be lifted. He writes: "[...] I can drop my weight and move my center away from my partner's center. I become too heavy to lift" (p. 27). This is a physical, embodied signal of "no", of not consenting. With the knowledge of how to say no, dancers can extend this idea to how they might consent to being lifted:

I push down into your shoulder, through your structure to make myself light and ease some of the burden off your arms. I reach my legs long and extend my body, trying to make myself light and easy to carry. I'm excited.

I want to fly! (BW) (5.3)

The dancer in this moment said "yes" through weight and touch by reaching into space, lifting her centre, and moving her centre closer to her partner's. This example also displays the dancer's intention. She wanted to be lifted, and her willingness was conveyed by the way she moved her weight and positioned her body.

In the standing stillness (6.2), touch conveyed consent as well, but more subtly:

The dance between our bodies and gravity does not feel like an offer or ask from either one of us; instead, a continuous question, continuously

answered. But, no questioning of our willingness to be here. A resting dance. My feet move a tiny bit to accommodate for the smallest weight shift, so that my bones feel totally stable. Minute wavers and subtle shifts in our bodies, but no uncertainty. The point of contact moves between us in such a way that no decisions felt made, only followed. The wavers and shifts are our dance, and I feel you feel them. We are guided by the physical, dropping into a state of surrender and ease. (EB, BW)

The touch and communication between these dancers was reflexive and responsive, drawing from the physical force of gravity and their bodily structures to co-create. Their mutual intention to remain in a state of following weight and touch, skin to skin, through their responsive bodies continuously reaffirmed their consent. When clear in intention, position, and pressure, touch allows us to communicate a nonverbal “yes” or “no” to our partners. For example, in 5.1, one dancer uses the pressure of her hand to direct another dancer away from movement to which she does not wish to consent:

You are rolling your head up the front of my body as I sit. If you keep moving in the direction you are going, you will roll over my face. I don't want you to squash my face. It's coming. As your head moves closer, my face scrunches in discomfort and I turn my head slightly. My face is here. Don't go that way! I use my right hand to redirect your head. Clear pressure and direction. I push on your head so that it comes to my shoulder instead. (NJ)

The dancer changes the course of their movement. Her touch is at once directive and responsive, in such a way that her partner did not recognize the change as one happening from

discomfort, instead, it was felt as a regular continuation of the dance. It was both. Consent is inherently part of contact improvisation. To embody and communicate consent is to practice the moment to moment improvisation of the form.

7.1.2 Nuances Beyond Touch

Despite the importance of touch, and my focus on touch as the primary mode of nonverbal communication in contact improvisation, it is not the only medium through which consent is embodied and communicated. Consent can be communicated without physical contact, for example, through eyes, facial expressions, proximity, mimicry, sound, and verbal cues, including laughter or words. The most prominent way that participants discussed consent beyond touch was with their eyes. The eyes and sight can serve an important role, because our eyes expand our awareness of the space, which can help dancers attune to the group, play with composition, and ensure safety. For example, in 4.1 the dancers began their dance through mirroring, observing and responding to learn about one another and co-create an improvised composition:

Watching forms and faces. We are trio of hands and feet, limbs and bodies meeting without touching. Compositional play. This is our dance of learning, learning about each other and to dance with one another. I am conscious of your movements, even though we are not touching. (SK)

The dancers' eyes, body positions, and proximity played an important role in building a foundation from which their dance could continue.

Through the eyes we can also invite a dance and check in with a partner. Eyes can lead us to what attracts us, be it the new or familiar. Sometimes we see something happening in a dance that we would like to be a part of, so we move toward it and join. Eye contact is also a way of

connecting, starting a conversation. Sometimes we catch another's eye across the dance floor, and in this eye contact we agree to begin a dance. Eye contact can be a way of checking consent. Sometimes while dancing with a partner, we make eye contact, and through the eye contact we confirm that we enjoy the dance and want it to continue:

Your eyes meet mine, and I see your joy mirroring my own. A moment of checking in within this lovely careful quintet. (MD) (1)

Checking in, seeing, observing, speculating, and judging, the eyes provide a window for being aware of the other dancers in the space. With our eyes we see the others. We recognize some, but maybe not all. We have previous experiences with some dancers and are curious about others. We have an idea of who each of these people are when we see them. Our eyes are the first sensory organs through which we judge and select, speculate and decide who to engage in a dance. Our eyes may draw us into a dance or help us decide what to communicate to a partner with whom we are already engaged in a dance. For example, in 5.4 the focus was on weight, however, the consent of one dancer depended on her seeing and judging that not consenting might injure other participants:

*Continuing in this moment is for safety only, the safety of you and others.
You are much bigger than me. I cannot hold you in this way if you pause or roll down. Continue coming toward me, I try to say to you through my touch... I don't know how to communicate my need and intention clearly.
I don't feel listened to. I'm afraid to drop you, to fall, to hurt myself, or you, or someone else. (BW)*

This moment problematizes consent in contact improvisation. Embodiment and communication are not black and white. The choice to consent or to withdraw consent is not always an easy one. Factors beyond and within dancers' control, such as safety in 5.4, colour and complicate the lived experience of dancing and consenting.

7.1.3 Consent in Context

I have written the word consent hundreds of times in this paper, but I have yet to unpack what consent means in the context of contact improvisation. Dance professor, Gina T'ai (2017) wrote in her *Contact Quarterly* article, "To practice CI is to practice consent[...]" (para.4), showing that consent is integral to practicing CI. But consent is integral to many practices that are arguably very different from contact improvisation, for example, consent for a medical operation. So, how is consent uniquely understood and revealed in the specific context of contact improvisation?

Through the examples of dancers' lived experiences in a jam (see chapters 1, 4, 5, and 6), a picture of consent begins to emerge. Consent finds itself on the edges of normative practices, among nuances, and within the meeting of bodies in a dance:

We agree to be in this intimate moment together. The consent is not only in the physicality of our dance, but in who I choose to be with in this intimate, quieter, more vulnerable space... I understand your consent through your responsiveness to our movements and how you stay with me in the moment. Sensing, always sensing, yet not initiating change. Mutual yes's in the texture of the dance unfolding. Consent through stillness, a lack of movement, an indication of continuation. (EB, BW) (6.2)

The dancers in this description communicated with one another through a shifting point of contact between their backs. Their communication of consent was continuous. They consented not only to be back to back, but to be in near stillness for a prolonged duration of time. In that stillness they agreed to the intention of releasing and following, finding ease and comfort in a dance where neither partner leads or initiates. The consent was tacit and responsive, rather than express and forthright. The dance was intimate and required vulnerability. The intimacy of stillness and touch in their dance evokes the tension between the norms of contact improvisation and the norms of society, because it draws attention to their contrasting perceptions of touch and the body.

Their dance was beyond the scope of societal normative practice. Two acquaintances reconnecting by standing and supporting one another without speaking for ten minutes would be strange in another context, but the norms of contact improvisation allows dances such as this to emerge. Touch and bodies are two concepts that differ drastically between societal and contact improvisational perceptions. The body and touch are often sexualized in mainstream society; however, through the physicality of the form and the different interpretations of touch offered by CI, the societal view is subverted, and bodies are, instead, viewed as responsive (Novack, 1990). The alternative view of bodies and touch are one way that the norms of CI differ from those of mainstream society. In CI, the quiet moment of intimacy between two women was not sexualized, instead, it was an intimate meeting between friends, a vulnerable and sensuous conversation between two bodies and the physical forces enacted upon them. Although within the bounds of normative CI practice, such intimacy and vulnerability within a dance is not a given. To be in such a space requires continuous consent from both dancers.

What does it mean to consent in the practice of contact improvisation? According to the theorizations of Kleinig (2010), consent has a moral aspect. The morality of an act or obligation,

and if consent is needed, relates to whether or not the act or obligation falls in the bounds of being normatively sanctioned within the given context. Kleinig (2010) writes that consent given in the appropriate context “[...] transform[s] the normative expectations that hold between people and groups” (p. 4). What are the normative practices and expectations that guide where consent is required in contact improvisation? I inquire into this question at two levels. First, I look at the act of entering a contact improvisation jam, and how consent is given merely by entering the space. Second, I continue from 7.1 and 7.2, unravelling the many strings that create a tapestry of what consent means within a single dance, as dancers embody continuous consent in moment-to-moment decisions of improvised co-creation.

When an individual enters a space to practice contact improvisation the individual consents to the normative practices of that space. For the individual to consent to the normative practices, they must meet the four conditions of competence, voluntariness, knowledge and intention (Kleinig, 2010, pp. 13-20). If the individual came to participate of their own accord and have the capacity to consent for themselves, they have met the first two conditions – competence and voluntariness. The intention and knowledge conditions of consent and how they relate to the normative practices of contact improvisation pose more of a challenge.

While speaking to the intention condition of consent, Kleinig (2010) briefly writes about consent and contact sports, which I extrapolate onto CI jams. He says: "It can be asserted with some confidence that those who play such sports professionally consent to certain risks inherent in the nature of the sport [...]" (p. 18); however, they do not consent to deliberate breaches of the rules. Participants in sports, or dancers in a jam, who choose to participate, therefore, consent to reasonably foreseeable risks and practices.

Contact improvisation does not have a codified set of rules and many of CI's normative practices are implicit in the movement and history of the dance form. Current discussions of safer spaces and consent in the contact community have resulted in many jams adopting sets of guidelines. These guidelines attempt to address, in-part, those actions on the dance floor that could be seen as a breach of the principles and values of CI. For example, Contact Improv Calgary (2018) and Toronto Sunday Contact Improv (2019) have written guidelines of practice for their communities. The guidelines of these two jams both address the physical and emotional safety of oneself and others, attending to the overall space and energy of the jam, and personal choice within a dance – you always have the option to say “no”. It is these guidelines that make the normative practices of a jam space explicit. So, when a dancer enters the space and consents to participate, these guidelines are what the dancer consents to; or, if no guidelines are available, they consent to the implicit rules of engagement in the space.

These implicit rules of engagement are problematic when it comes to meeting Kleinig's (2010) knowledge condition of consent. For individuals to consent to something, they must be informed about what it is they are consenting to. If the normative practices in a jam space are not made explicit, can informed consent be given? Despite, or perhaps because of, the lack of certainty about what contact improvisation is and what it means to consent to participate, dancers are drawn to the improvised form. Perhaps, the true consent does not occur when one steps through the doors and enters the dance space, although this is crucial as well. Instead, consent in contact improvisation is most prominently embodied and negotiated on the dance floor, within a dance, in each and every moment:

*We are not in contact. I make myself available to be here. I choose to stay
in this moment. We move closer. It is about listening, sensing the space,*

and finding a place of common ground. I don't feel like anyone is trying to overpower anyone else. Mimicry evolves into the play of meeting each other, being available, listening, and reacting. I'm listening to your decisions and letting them influence my decisions. (NJ) (4.1)

In the example above, and in the description of the two women standing in stillness (6.2), all dancers had consented to participate in the jam. Not only did they consent by entering the space, they also signed a consent form to participate in the study. However, these significations of consent only admitted the individuals to the space. They were not obligated to dance with anyone, and some participants chose to sit and witness or dance solo for portions of the jam. Underlying this peripheral layer of consent is the consent that occurred for these individuals within their dances. As the norms in CI can be fluid, jam to jam, dance to dance, consent arises through the body in moments of discovering and building an improvisation.

Looking again to Kleinig's (2010) four conditions of consent, competence and voluntariness are assumed when an offer to dance is accepted:

I place my hand on the cool floor of the dance studio. I feel mischievously playful, aware that with this final, confident, placement I mirror your body as it faces mine. This is my offering to you. Three of us sit here. We form a triangle on the floor, with hands placed into the centre and fingers spread, sensing the ground as if it is another skin. We wait. The wait is not impatient but energized. Your response is deliberate, and the game begins. (BW) (4.1)

The dancers created a game of offering and responding, and, through each response they reaffirmed their consent to participate. Signifying consent in CI is not a one-time act. Consent is an ongoing, embedded, and embodied practice. In each moment, dancers make decisions about how to engage with themselves, the space, and the other dancers. The game developed in 4.1 was co-created, and, in that co-creation, rules or norms were established nonverbally. Are the norms of a dance built through the act of consenting in the dance itself? The mutually created and agreed upon guidelines are indicated by one participant in 4.1:

We move closer and closer. I brush your foot and leg, but the confines of our negative-space-trio keep us from acknowledging the small, unintentional touches. I feel a bit guilty for these moments of unintentional touch, like I am ruining the game. (BW)

In a sense, the intention condition of consent confined their game. The intention condition speaks to the assumptions underlying consent in a particular circumstance (Kleinig, 2010, pp. 17-20). In the broader example of entering a jam space, dancers assume risk for participation based on the bounds of what would be considered reasonable risk given the context of contact improvisation. Although CI provides a structure through which to understand the risks of the dance, it does not prescribe movements and the range of what can happen on the dance floor is immense. Not every person would consent to every possibility just by walking through the doors and into a jam. A slow-moving, nearly-still encounter could last ten seconds or two hours. A dance could be rough, forceful, and even combative, if both people consent. Other than the facilitator of the jam, who holds the space, the dancers assume personal responsibility for what occurs in their dances. Dancers are tasked with the responsibility to establish boundaries and communicate their wants and needs within a dance to their partners – this could also be understood as the basic

principle of contact improvisation, take care of and responsibility for yourself (Keogh, 2018, p. 28). Dancer and advocate Michele Beaulieux (2019a) writes about the need to move away from this first rule and put more emphasis on taking care of others; however, in both cases being self-aware and understanding how to communicate “yes” and “no” to one’s partner remains imperative. Through their “yes” and “no” communications of consent, dancers convey to each other what is and is not permissible in their dances.

In the microcosm of a dance, the boundaries of intention are co-created through exploration. For example, a female dancer may not want her chest to become a point of contact. After a few minutes of dancing, this might become clear to her partner by the way she positions her body to avoid touching her chest to the other dancer. Providing her partner is aware and responsive to her communication, they continue and the assumption of not rolling across her chest underlies their dance. The assumption would remain unless she explicitly and purposefully signifies a change by allowing the point of contact to cross her chest. In 4.1, the game between the trio of dancers created bounds and assumptions for their dance in which physical contact was not an intention. Gradually, through offers and responses that broadened the boundaries of the assumptions underlying their consent, the dancers changed the intention of their dance to come into physical contact:

I don't feel like anyone is trying to overpower anyone else. Mimicry evolves into the play of meeting each other, being available, listening, and reacting. I'm listening to your decisions and letting them influence my decisions. When a change is offered, I react to that as well. My hips are in the air, legs stretched straight and head pointed toward the ground. My momentum is slowly taking me backward, until I connect with your leg. (NJ)

The norms of a dance take shape and change within each dance. With each individual pressing and exploring into the gaps where consent may be required, the dancers are communicating through their bodies and the boundaries of what is normative are continuously shifting. Dancers do not speak, yet they consent. Body to body, they transfer knowledge. What constitutes this knowledge and how can an intention be made clear in a dance that is both nonverbal and improvised? The knowledge condition of consent maintains that the agent consenting must have sufficient knowledge about to what they are consenting (Kleinig, 2010, pp. 16-17). Can consent occur between bodies without verbal expression of information or before thoughts pertaining to consent occur?

The awareness learned through the contact improvisation is one that embraces multiple modes of sensing and knowing. Touch and proprioception become integral, melding with other senses to generate an experience larger and richer than those predominated by sight and thought. As with sight, conscious thought shows us only a fraction of what is in front of us. Opening to a greater awareness of other senses and the space is necessary for ease and safety in CI, and, in doing so, body knowledge comes to the forefront. What implication does body knowledge have for the enactment of consent? My body can respond more quickly to a fall than my mind can think to catch me. I feel and respond to the slight shift in weight between us before I register that any change has occurred:

My feet move a tiny bit to accommodate for the smallest weight shift, so that my bones feel totally stable... The wavers and shifts are our dance, and I feel you feel them. We are guided by the physical, dropping into a state of surrender and ease. (EB, BW) (6.2)

Perhaps through our embodied senses we receive all the information we need to make a decision about consent. Taking this further, perhaps then, an offer of consent can be responded to through openness and trust in body knowledge, rather than requiring a mental decision-making process. Regardless of the way that the decision to consent is made, the enactment or signification of consent occurs primarily through the body. In their improvisations, dancers embody actions, through touch or another medium, that convey consent across morphing normative boundaries.

7.2 Sensing Consent

Each moment of consent is not entirely reproducible. They may be similar, but they are not the same. How then, can we explore the experience of sensing consent by contact improvisers? What do these communications of nonverbal consent look and feel like? In a sense, what communications of consent look and feel like has been demonstrated throughout this paper. The answer lies in the descriptions of lived experience shared in chapters 1, 4, 5, and 6.

Lived experience, understood phenomenologically, cannot be fully grasped without the concept of the moment of the Now, or the prereflective moment. In his introduction to *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty (1962) writes about recalling the prereflective:

Prior to any contribution by memory, that which is seen must currently be organized in such a way as to offer me a scene in which I can recognize my previous experiences. Thus, the appeal to memory presupposes what it is meant to explain, namely, the articulation of the givens, the imposing of a sense onto the sensible chaos. The evocation of memory becomes superfluous the moment that it is made possible, since the work that we expect from it has thus already been accomplished.

(p. 20)

The Now in which lived experience is situated comes before reflection and before the naming of things; however, these experiences are paradoxically only grasped by language and reflected upon through memory. Nevertheless, focusing on lived experience means “[...] the phenomenology is interested in recovering somehow the living moments of the ‘now’ or existence – even before we put language to it or describe it in words” (van Manen, 2014, p. 57). In the descriptions presented throughout this thesis, I have attempted to capture lived experience in the prereflective moment, because these are the instances in which embodied, nonverbal communications of consent occur. By trying to capture these moments, I aim to coax an inkling of understanding and meaning from them; understanding beyond “yes” this is consent, “no” this is not consent, or the social guidelines and structures which impose ideas of how consent should be. And so, it is through the lens of lived experience and the prereflective Now that I address the question of what the communications of nonverbal consent look and feel like in a contact improvisation dance.

The question is best understood through personal lived experience, because moments are felt and seen differently from inside the dance or as an outside observer. I have a habit of saying that contact improvisation must be experienced to be truly understood, and I believe this extends to the communication of consent within the form as well. Is that not the case with nearly everything we do and then try to describe in words? Additionally, everyone feels and sees moments of consent differently. Every dance is a conversation between two or more individuals, two human beings with unique personalities, past experiences, habits, and affinities. The conversation is not always an easeful one, because each person comes to the dancefloor as themselves. Meeting being to being, dances can be awkward, uncertain, tentative, uncomfortable, joyful, dramatic, simple, sensual, mischievous, and everything in between. From the individuals present, possibilities for

the dance emerge. These possibilities are also constrained by the normative practices embedded in the jam, as well as the norms of society. People's individual differences impact their experiences of the nonverbal communication of consent, because each individual is different in how and to what they will consent in a given dance.

With these caveats in mind, I speak most clearly to what these communications look and feel like to me, as both a researcher and a dancer. I sit, as I did in the introduction (1) of this thesis, both within and without, in a quest of meaning and understanding:

I watch, drinking in the landscape of bodies with my eyes, feeling the press of their weight on my stomach, my thighs, and witnessing myself among the others. More real than life, it feels, to witness us through the mirror and from within. I see the bodies on the floor with me, and the ones beyond the mirror, seemingly a room away, building a beautiful, fragile scene unfolding before my eyes. I am struck by the wonder of the moment. I feel consent in the stillness and the watching. In this moment, I am within and without, touching and being touched, present to the weight and breath of our bodies, yet curiously observing the scene unfold. (BW)

In this moment, I embody the notion of intertwining as my body bridges the sensations of touching and being touch. “[...] [I]n touching myself, I grasp the tangible “in itself” since I know *from the inside* what it is to be touched, that is, to be tangible” (Mensch, 2009, p. 8). Simultaneously, I saw and I felt. In particular, intertwining can be seen in the way that I saw myself seeing me among the others in the mirror. I saw myself being seen by myself. The description above also begins to evoke a sense of Merleau-Ponty's (1968) intercorporeity, as I felt myself touched, under the weight of a partner, yet touching him in return. I remained there. My choice is

consent through stillness, but my feeling of communicating consent in this moment is layered by the experience of sensing.

In 6.2, I sensed the space similarly. The consent rested, again, in the near stillness between two dancers. The stillness held intimacy and revealed comfort, akin to a silence in a conversation. With a close friend, the silence between sentences may seem easeful or pleasant and extend for long periods of time. The silence allows space for thought and clarifies intention. Two minds wandering side-by-side, not in a rush to overtake the other, but companions on a journey. In contrast, a short pause in conversation with an acquaintance can feel excruciatingly long, prompting someone to speak before thoughts are fully formed, just to fill the quiet. We jump to conclusions, questioning the other's perception of the conversation. What are you thinking? Did I say something wrong? What do you expect? Some attention is stolen from our own experience, thoughts, and needs. The intimacy of being aware of and attending to oneself and the other, revealing oneself to the other, and willingly entering a soft sensual moment is a risk, a show of trust and confidence in the dance as it unfolds. In this dance, we looked as though we stood still, but we felt our conversation as one between close friends:

A whisper so clear it could be a shout. There is no mistaking what is being said between us... You feel familiar. I am comfortable here. I could stay here indefinitely... I understand your consent through your responsiveness to our movements and how you stay with me in the moment. Sensing, always sensing, yet not initiating change... A sense of not needing to do anything else, being content in the moment. In each moment. (EB, BW)

Comfort evolved into a shared understanding, the intimacy in giving oneself fully to the dance. The flow in these moments of giving of oneself to the dance and to the other creates the

sensation that neither dancer is leading, instead, they both follow. This moment, more than the others, brings to mind the notion of Intercorporeity. Like the intertwining, the sense of acting upon and being acted upon are inseparable, but they are now placed between bodies that are simultaneously sensing and being sensed. Merleau-Ponty (1968) describes this sense of reversibility between bodies:

This means that while each monocular vision, each touching with one sole hand has its own visible, its tactile, each is bound to every other vision, to every other touch; it is bound in such a way as to make up with them the experience of one sole body before one sole world, through a possibility for reversion, reconversion of its language into theirs, transfer, and reversal, according to which the little private world of each is not juxtaposed to the world of all the others, but surrounded by it [...]. (p. 142)

The description from chapter 1 revealed intercorporeity, but the description in 6.2 goes one step further, as both dancers are also aware of the sensing and being sensed-ness of the other. They fold over one another in a dance of consensual co-creation:

The dance between our bodies and gravity does not feel like an offer or ask from either one of us; instead, a continuous question, continuously answered. But, no questioning of our willingness to be here. A resting dance. My feet move a tiny bit to accommodate for the smallest weight shift, so that my bones feel totally stable. Minute wavers and subtle shifts in our bodies, but no uncertainty. The point of contact moves between us in such a way that no decisions felt made, only followed. The wavers and shifts are our dance, and I feel you feel them. (EB, BW)

Consent feels clear. Clarity between two bodies, within one body, between intention and action. Sensation is at the forefront, with no distraction from thoughts of the world outside the dance. Two bodies focused in a single moment, on a single point of contact.

In contrast, when I feel and see moments of uncertainty, the communication does not seem clear. The awareness of intercorporeity and the intertwining dwindle. The dance becomes wobbly, cues are miscommunicated or missed, dancers do not feel grounded, or someone falls behind while another surges ahead. The dance no longer lends itself so readily to intercorporeity. However, uncertainty is part of the play and negotiation of consent; perhaps, some of the joy and interest in a dance is found in puzzling out an instance of confusion. For example, I watched a moment of miscommunication between two dancers. Although they both felt the conflict, the joy of their play emerged through laughter:

You shuffle your body toward me, keeping your hand on my hip. In the weight change, I curve my spine in the opposite direction for a moment.

Miscommunication. A giggle escapes me amidst the struggle. (NJ) (5.2)

The dancers in this moment had conflicting intentions about the direction they wanted to go. They felt the miscommunication and struggle; however, their miscommunication was not cause for despair, instead, it was part of their game. One dancer suggested their miscommunication was due to a loss of connection, a loss of sensing the other for a moment. She also suggested that uncertainty comes when one's not grounded. Rekindling the felt sense of the other dancer, where the other's body is through their center of gravity and the floor, is necessary for feeling nonverbal communications.

From the outside, struggles of communication may seem less apparent. In 5.4, I tried to withdraw my consent or redirect my partner, but my communication was not clear. In contrast to 5.2, the miscommunication and uncertainty in 5.4 leached the joy and ease from our dance:

I am on the edge of being able to support you. When you move toward me again, you move quickly. I brace myself and push my weight into you as you spiral forcefully into me. I stumble backward as I'm set off balance, but I catch both of us by leaning and pushing into you. You come to standing. I'm glad you moved toward me again, as I was not sure how to get out of the predicament in another way. This is the direction I wanted you to go, but we could have done it slowly and easefully. I feel relieved.

No one is hurt. The tone of our dance has changed for me. (BW)

I felt overcome with panic and then resolve. I had to ensure the safety of the others in the room. I felt off-balance. There was strain in my body. I tried to indicate to my partner that I needed him to continue moving. I did not enjoy this moment; however, I did consent to this moment. Both my partner and I felt a sense of doubt and lack of clarity, bringing some similarity to our experience. When we spoke in the interview, I was relieved that he felt a moment of doubt at the same time as me, because it revealed to me that my nonverbal communications were not entirely unnoticed. We had shared in our miscommunication.

Dancers' lived experiences of nonverbal consent in prereflective moments reveal the prevalence of intertwining and intercorporeity in communication during a CI dance. These notions are revealed through how the communications are felt and sensed. In turn, they point to the necessary awareness and sensitivity characteristic of the experience of dancing contact improvisation.

7.3 Experiencing Consent

In section, 7.2 I touched on the differences in individuals' lived experiences. Because each person's lived experience is unique, dancers' experiences of consent communication within a dance always differ. Now I ask how these experiences of consent communication differ for dancers involved in the same moment of conflict or consent. To explore some of the differences, I selected two descriptions, 5.1 and 5.4. Although I could deeply dive into any moment of consent, I chose these two for their respective simplicity and complexity. Through these two examples, I aim to compare partners' experiences of consent within the same moment of communication.

The description in 5.1 presents a clear difference in communication and experience of the two dancers. Simply put, the first dancer noticed impending discomfort and acted to change the direction of her partner's movement. The second dancer was unaware of the discomfort and accepted the change in their dance as part of the dance, not as a redirection of what was being consented to:

You are rolling your head up the front of my body as I sit. If you keep moving in the direction you are going, you will roll over my face. I don't want you to squash my face. It's coming. As your head moves closer, my face scrunches in discomfort and I turn my head slightly. My face is here. Don't go that way! I use my right hand to redirect your head. Clear pressure and direction. I push on your head so that it comes to my shoulder instead. (NJ)

My head comes to your shoulder. We are back to back for a moment, with another's head and upper body between us. A small rest with my head on your shoulder. (SK)

Thank you. (NJ)

The dancers' experiences of this moment differed drastically. They differed in terms of awareness and intention. Awareness in CI is multifaceted. Awareness of self, partner, other dancers, and the space clarifies intention, promotes safety, and underlies consent. Being aware and fully in the physicality of the moment is a learned practice. For example, the self-awareness of what one consents to and how that consent is physically communicated to their partner is integral to the dance. To quote Keogh (2003), "Until a person has the confidence and ability to say no to something, he or she won't have the trust and capacity to fully say yes to it" (p.62). To say "yes" and "no" a dancer must have the self-awareness to understand their own desires and boundaries, and furthermore, a dancer must understand how to communicate these through bodily "yes"s and "no"s. Awareness, or listening, allows for responsiveness to one's own needs, the needs of one's partner, and changes in the dance. This constant attentiveness to self and others manifests in different ways throughout the course of a dance or jam.

Intention in movement and touch is subtle, conveyed through pressure, position, attention, and energy. Intention is not easily described, as it can be felt more than it can be seen. One participant described intention like this:

It's almost like that feeling of when you walk into the room and there's an argument. You don't have to hear anybody saying anything, but you can feel this heavy air. Like, what do you say, cut the tension with a knife? So, just by feeling

the energy. It's a little bit intangible, but, yeah, you can feel a certain energy. And that's not always correct either. It may be a misunderstanding. But there is a certain intuition that we have as humans, and this ability to read people, and how you just feel with them. (NJ)

The intention behind movement and touch is paramount for how dancers experience the dance. In the above quote, the dancer was speaking about ill intent touch, and the discomfort that arises when intentionally touched inappropriately. She also noted that her partner's responsiveness to her reaction to the inappropriate touch is an indication of whether the uncomfortable touch was purposeful. If her partner continuously returns to the same kind of touch after she directs their body away from that place or kind of touch, she is not being listened to and it is time to leave the dance. Intention arises in conversations about consent and CI, particularly in moments of perceived and unwanted sexual touch. However, intention is also discussed in terms of commitment to a dance or movement. Through intention dancers find clarity in their own movement, which can then be communicated to their partners. This clarity of communication was how intention arose in 5.1.

In 5.1, the first dancer's awareness was on the trajectory of her partner and her own impending discomfort. Her intention in the moment of decision was direct and clear, using her hand to move her partner's head. The second dancer's awareness remained on the point of contact between their bodies, not extending to the potential discomfort of his partner. His intention lay in his movement, continuing the dance, and sensing into himself and his partner.

A moment of consent appears where there is potential for change and with that change, the need for reaffirming the continuous agreement of remaining in the dance together. The first dancer needed to reaffirm her consent by physically shifting the direction of their dance. Through his

body, the second dancer responded in agreement to her shift. Reaffirmed, the dance continued, clear and certain.

In 5.4, the dancers' experiences of consent communication appear more complex. Both dancers experienced a moment of confidence followed by doubt and uncertainty, later trailed by a solution to their common problem. However, their predicaments differed in the moment of negotiation. In the moment of confidence, the first dancer was excited to be holding the larger dancer on her legs. To her, the balance was surprising, but extremely stable. The second dancer felt safe, but he was aware of being both larger and heavier than the dancer supporting him:

I stand curled over you. I have my arms under you and then switch them to above, helping and guiding you onto my legs. I welcome this taking of weight. I feel the point of our connection slowly moving up both my thighs from my knees. Your entire body weight is rested on the bones of my lower legs. I'm surprised and excited to hold you in this way. (BW)

I am half supported by your thighs, and half supported on my limbs, fingers and toes touching the ground. I roll up your legs and reach my other arm to your back, helping you to support my movement upward and toward you. My weight is entirely supported by you. I feel safe, yet I am aware of my heavier weight on your smaller body. (MD)

Their differences in weight and positions in the dance greatly impacted their experiences. Had the dancers swapped positions, their experiences of the moment and how the moment unravelled would likely have changed substantially. The second dancer's weight on the first

dancer's frame excited her in one moment and worried her in the next. She was not used to supporting such a weight, and, in her panic, she lost clarity in her communication:

I feel that if you continue to roll toward my center of gravity, I can continue to support you, and perhaps even bring you to standing. Stable and confident. You pause. I panic. My trust in myself falters. Can I actually hold you here? My chest contracts and I stop breathing. A moment of doubt, confusion, and uncertainty. Stay in it, I say to myself, this is part of the game. I straighten my back, trying to maintain balance, with my hands still holding you for safety.

Continuing in this moment is for safety only, the safety of you and others. You are much bigger than me. I cannot hold you in this way if you pause or roll down. Continue coming toward me, I try to say to you through my touch. By offering slight variations in pressure, I try to indicate that you should speed up or change the decision to pause, but I am not clear in myself as to the direction, and not clear to you, I think. I cannot let you drop, for your safety and the safety of the dancers beneath us. I try in various places and ways. I don't know how to communicate my need and intention clearly. I don't feel listened to. I'm afraid to drop you, to fall, to hurt myself, or you, or someone else. Time expands, mere seconds becoming minutes, as I watch you reach to her and as she slips away from underneath you. I came to expect you to move with her, away from me. A moment of doubt about whether I can support your weight or not. I hold on, no longer comfortable with your weight on me. (BW)

She did not feel listened to by her partner. Her partner may not have felt her cues to continue rolling, but he felt or shared her feeling of uncertainty and doubt. Perhaps doubt was conveyed through their bodies instead of her directive communication to continue rolling.

The second dancer cast his awareness toward another dancer on the floor. He saw that she was offering a support. Knowing his weight might be too much for his partner, he assumed the third dancer had seen that his partner needed assistance. Ironically, reaching toward the third dancer instigated the uncertainty in his partner and her need for assistance:

I see another dancer near, she seems to offer a ledge. I let my left arm go and extend backward, reaching myself and my head toward another's shoulder, while remaining supported by you. She may have seen something I didn't.

A moment of doubt. Uncertainty. Are you able to take my full weight? Conscious of being heavier than most dancers, I move toward her, but she moves away, giggling, when I try to reach to her. A moment of confusion. What do I do now? Not abandoning the perch on your thighs, I return to you, rolling again up your legs, my feet reaching for the floor. I rotate quickly, spiralling up and toward your center. I throw myself into you and off balance. One quick weight shift and then another, bigger one. You stumble but catch us. We regain our footing, both of us standing, and we continue to dance. (MD)

When the third dancer moved away, the partners were left with a precarious puzzle. The first dancer was consenting to the moment for the safety of all dancers involved. She did not enjoy

the moment. The second dancer was reaching for help, unknowingly causing more difficulty for his partner. In contrast to 5.1, where clarity of intention quickly provided a solution to the moment of conflict, clarity was not fully achieved in 5.4. The solution to their problem was rocky. The second dancer decided to move again toward the first dancer. She had wanted him to do so, but when it happened, she was caught off guard. Her response, to lean her weight quickly into her partner, kept them both upright and came from bodily knowing:

I am on the edge of being able to support you. When you move toward me again, you move quickly. I brace myself and push my weight into you as you spiral forcefully into me. I stumble backward as I'm set off balance, but I catch both of us by leaning and pushing into you. You come to standing. I'm glad you moved toward me again, as I was not sure how to get out of the predicament in another way. This is the direction I wanted you to go, but we could have done it slowly and easefully. I feel relieved. No one is hurt. The tone of our dance has changed for me. (BW)

Her experience of this moment ranged from surprised excitement, to panic and doubt, to the hurt and neglected feeling of being ignored by someone while trying desperately to communicate to them. Physically, her experience was one of bearing weight beyond what she was comfortable. Her partner's experience was one of being supported by uncertain, shaky supports, bringing to the forefront his heavier weight on her smaller body. He attempted to assist her by gaining new support, but, instead, he gave the impression of not responding to her communication, and he was not able to find the support for which he reached. The solution to their predicament was his quick decision and change in intention, and her automatic bodily response, keeping them both on their feet.

The descriptions in 5.1 and 5.4 are examples of how dancers' experiences differ while they are both engaged in the same moment of conflict or consent. In each description throughout this thesis, distinctive differences can be seen. These differences arise between uniqueness and improvisation - every body is different, every jam is different, and every dance is different. The nuances of how consent is embodied, communicated, sensed, and experienced range from day to day and partner to partner. The nonverbal communication of consent in contact improvisation is not a simple matter. In this chapter, I attempted to tease apart the knots of complexity surrounding dancers' lived experiences and make visible some of the threads that colour consent.

8. Conclusion

The purpose of my work was to better understand individuals' lived experiences of communicating consent nonverbally in contact improvisation dance. Through a phenomenological theoretical lens, I studied the experiences of nonverbal consent in contact improvisation for five dancers, including myself. From their experiences, I created evocative, sensuous descriptions to put into words what is felt and understood bodily in those moments, attempting to grasp the ephemeral instances that hold meaning and yet slip from our fingers just as we go to grasp them.

The descriptions of select moments from a dance jam with four participants provided insight and fueled further reflection into dancers' lived experiences and my research questions. Investigation into the differences and nuances of lived experience moments within and between dancers revealed how the clarity in communications impacts the signification of consent and development of normative boundaries and understandings. Body knowledge, individual differences, awareness, intention, and experience with CI arose as nuances that influenced how consent was experienced by different dancers. Even within the same moment of consent negotiation, dancer's experiences differed, pointing to the complex nature of communication in the context of contact improvisation.

The significance of my work is its contribution to knowledge about how consent is experienced, adding to discussions about consent in contact improvisation by giving voice to the underlying nuances of nonverbal communications. Additionally, the overarching literature on consent spans quantitative and qualitative methodologies; however, rarely does a study focus on the lived experience of consent through phenomenology. The strengths of my research stem from its unique position among consent literature due to methodology and insights derived from its

methodology. Through phenomenological inquiry, I aimed not to find a solution to a problem, but to provide detail to a complex issue. Phenomenological inquiry does not provide empirical generalization and theoretical understanding or prescribe individual psychology; “[r]ather, the phenomenological example is a philological device that holds in a certain tension the intelligibility of the singular” (van Manen, 2014, p. 260), ushering forth understanding that is reoccurring and essential about a phenomenon in an existential sense or orienting toward what is unique and singular (p. 352). My inquiry into the embodiment and communication of nonverbal consent in contact improvisation revealed nuances of and beyond touch, explored the sensuality of consent, and spoke to the different possibilities and experiences within dancers’ nonverbal communication.

8.1 Limitations

Because this study is phenomenological, it looks at experience, not opinions, views, perceptions, guidelines, or individual psychologies; instead, it brings the way the phenomenon of consent is experienced into awareness and complicates the processes of consent, with the aim of adding layers to meaning and provoking thought and new understandings.

The limitations of my study stem from the scope of the study and methodological challenges. I briefly discuss the following limitations: lack of verbal communication, transferability, missing intersectionality, impact of the researcher on the research, participant self-selection, and methodological challenges for a first-time human science phenomenologist.

My main research question focused on nonverbal communication, thereby, not accounting for the verbal ways we communicate consent in CI. Often, dancers have brief conversations to negotiate boundaries with a new partner before or during a dance. Dancers may also remove themselves from a dance or indicate consent with verbal cues. However, even within verbal

communication, nonverbal communication exists. I chose to narrow the scope of my research to nonverbal communication to capture its often missed and subtle nuances.

Additionally, I could not address how or if my findings are transferable to other contexts of nonverbal consent, because consent is enacted differently in different contexts. I was curious about the process of learning to communicate consent through the body, as can be seen in CI. How does one learn to say yes or no to giving weight or certain kinds of touch? How does one assert boundaries and listen for the no in their partners' dances? What are the lived experiences of learning and enacting these ideas? Deep inquiry into these questions was beyond the scope of this study, but they may provide fertile ground for future research.

Also beyond the scope of this study is attention to the different intersectionalities of bodies in contact improvisation. I did not investigate deeply into the impact of race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, socio-economic status, and power on the communication of consent in CI. These factors are important to consider, and much has been written and discussed concerning intersectionalities and power and privilege in contact improvisation (Goldman, 2007; Davies, 2008; Mang, Torrado, & Chan, 2017; Bachrach et al., 2018; Smith et al. 2018; Beaulieux, 2019a; Mitra, 2019; Radical Contact, 2019; Yohalem, 2019). I recommend future research to extend the work of my study by considering these factors and how they influence the lived experience of the nonverbal communication of consent for contact improvisation dancers.

Methodologically, one limitation is that I, as a researcher, changed the phenomenon of nonverbal consent and the way it was experienced by participants in three ways. First, although I attempted to make both stages of data collection as comfortable and commonplace as possible, just by observing and video-recording I changed how the space is normally experienced. In a jam, dances are rarely recorded, so by video-recording I changed the way the dance space is

experienced, thereby shifting the participants' experiences within the space. van Manen (2014) writes, "Even life captured directly by audio-recorder or camera is already transformed at the moment it is captured" (p. 313). Second, I tried to minimize the influence of the study's purpose on the jam by using broad language of exploring 'embodied communication and interaction' instead of 'consent', because I want to avoid influencing how the dancers performed. Had the dancers known about the purpose of inquiring into consent before taking part in the jam, they may have attempted to perform consent. Third, during interviews "neither party goes into an interview neutrally or without conscious and unconscious goals, expectations, agendas, and emotions [...]" These choices and reactions are grounded not just in the present interaction of body-selves but in past experiences as embodied people. We do our bodies in specific ways in interviews" (Ellingson, 2017, p. 102) (p. 103). As a researcher, doing my body in a specific way, I influenced the words, actions, and responses of the interviewees. Although I influenced the participants, my presence within the study also afforded me valuable insight into the nonverbal experience of consent within the jam and helped me to build rapport with participants, which were integral in the interviews and for describing and interpreting the results.

I also faced a limitation due to my method of sampling. Because my participant sample is self-selected, the research may have been biased by contact improvisors who have interest in communication and the experience of consent within the CI context. Future research in this area might consider working with participants who are practising contact improvisation for the first time, which could give insight into the lived experience of learning how to nonverbally embody and communicate consent within a dance. This limitation could also be viewed as a strength, because the participants were comfortable in their bodies and with dancing CI. They were already

used to thinking about and discussing their embodied experiences in contact improvisation before their participation in this study.

As a first-time phenomenologist, my methodological process was filled with learning moments. The interviews were particularly challenging in terms of asking participants questions that re-evoked participants' senses and embodiment. Van Manen (2014) writes, "Generally, people tend to have much less difficulty sharing their opinions, views, and perceptions than sharing sensitive experiential accounts" (p. 54). Distinguishing participants' thoughts, ideas, and perceptions from their lived experiences posed a challenge that I willingly tackled. The process was one of continually learning, with each interview providing new insights into how questions can be posed to better insight lived experiences. Despite learning to better inquire into lived experiences, I was still faced with an inherent difficulty of phenomenology: "[...] even the most evocative experiential description will fail to capture the fullness and subtleties of our experience as we live it (van Manen, 2014, p. 54). Although I could not fully capture the Now of each moment, as I progressed through the interviews, I was able to ask questions that brought me closer and closer to what participants' lived experiences may have been like. I take these learnings forward as I move into future research.

8.2 Implications for Further Research

Phenomenological inquiries are not generalizable, so my study of consent does not give concrete guidelines or prescribe how dancers should or should not communicate consent nonverbally in contact improvisation. However, dancers may find meaning within this text to inform their understanding, influencing individual practice or supplementing the development and exploration of guidelines. The applications of my research lie in individual practice and

understanding, aiding in the quest for meaning about consent as it is communicated and embodied nonverbally.

Researchers looking more closely at the phenomenology of consent in contact improvisation might address the moments of ill intent in a dance, particularly sexual intent, as these are most often discussed in CI communities. Such moments did not occur in the jam during this study, however, the dancers mentioned previous experiences and conversations around the topic. How is sexual intent in a moment of consent experienced from the perspective of both dancers? Such a study would add to the descriptions and interpretations of this study and supplement further possible guideline development. Additionally, further research could look more closely at already established guidelines for consent to see how these fit with or oppose how consent is enacted in a dance.

As mentioned in the limitation section, I recommend future research to extend the work of my study by considering power and privilege, as well as intersectionalities, in future studies of the nonverbal communication of consent for CI, to add to current discussions around these topics.

Researchers might also find research material in the notions of learning and transferability. How do dancers learn to communicate consent through their bodies? How do they learn the normative practices of CI and shed the normative skin of society when entering a dance space? And through this learning, what do we take beyond the dance floor when we practice embodying consent in other contexts? How does the physicality of consent in contact improvisation inform our everyday interactions, our verbal and nonverbal “yes”s and “no”s that set the stage for how others respond to us, and the implicit necessity of listening that foregrounds being aware of and listening for others’ communications of consent? What do we learn about ourselves and each other through nonverbal listening and responding? Does the way we communicate nonverbally in CI

have implications in a health care or therapeutic setting, when working with individuals who are nonverbal, or in intimate interpersonal relationships? Can contact improvisation be used to teach and learn about nonverbal consent in other areas of life? Future research could build upon the methods of my study to look at the nonverbal communication of consent and the complexity of touch in contexts beyond contact improvisation, for example, when working with patients who are nonverbal in a medical or care-giving setting. Or, my research could be extended by exploring how the nonverbal communication of consent is learned and how this learning is experienced.

Inquires into embodied and nonverbal consent communication in contact improvisation present many unexplored avenues for a researcher or dancer to wander and wonder.

We are in it together, not just two people touching in our own worlds. Your whole being is here, meeting mine. We follow the path as it is simultaneously created. Willingly walking forward into the unknown. (6.2)

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Appendix A: Sample Participant Consent Form



a place of mind
THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Nuances of Touch

July 2019

Dear _____ [Participant's Name]

Thank you for your interest in participating in the research project on nonverbal embodiment of communications and interactions in contact improvisation (CI) entitled, "Nuances of Touch". This study is being conducted by Dr. Barbara Weber (principal investigator) and Brynn Williams (co-investigator, graduate student in the Faculty of Education, University of British Columbia, Vancouver). Listed below are several aspects of this project that you need to know:

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to better understand individuals' lived experiences of non-verbally communicating in contact improvisation dance.

What will you be asked to do if you choose to participate in the study?

- Provide your written consent to participate in this study.
- Participate in and reflect on one video-recorded contact improvisation jam (July/August 2019), which will take approximately two hours.
- Engage in a 45-60-minute interview about your experience in the jam. These interviews will take place in the month following the jam and involve viewing a few short video clips from the jam.
- Review the material the researchers gather from you to ensure that it represents your experience
- (Potentially) Engage in a second, 30-45-minute, interview with the researcher and one other participant.

What are the benefits of participating in this study?

Participants will help contribute to understanding about non-verbal communication in contact improvisation through your personal lived experiences, adding to dialogues both in the dance community and in the scholarly community. If you wish, you also have the opportunity to be attributed as a contributor to the researcher by being identified by name in any written work produced through this research. Additionally, you will have the opportunity to participate in a CI jam, free of charge, with a small snack provided following the experience. Please indicate if you have any dietary restrictions on page 3.

Are there any risks if you participate in this study?

There are no known risks to dancers for participating in this study. The risks assumed in this study are the same as those assumed when you choose to participate in any CI jam.

Your participation in this project is voluntary. At any given time, you can decide to withdraw from participating in the study without any negative consequences, even after signing this consent form.

How will your privacy be maintained?

Any personal information provided during this research study will be kept confidential, however, the nature of the study does not allow your participation to be completely anonymous. All documents will be kept secured. Only the researchers will have access to the data until publication, with the exception of short video clips that will be viewed by the other participants. Publication may require the data to be made publicly available, and so, the researchers cannot guarantee complete protection of your identity. However, your name will not be identified on any published material without your consent. Once the data is made publicly available, you will not be able to withdraw your data from the study. Alternatively, you also have the option to be identified by name on any reports or articles written at the completion of the study (see page 3). If you choose to be attributed by name, the researchers cannot promise that your identity will be protected.

How will the data from the study be used?

The data will be used to understand how communications and interactions occur in CI. The video from the jam will be analysed by the researchers, and then short clips of the video will be used as prompts in the individual interviews with all participants. The researchers do not intend to share the video with the public; however, should the researchers find something pivotal in the video which they would like to share beyond the analysis stage (i.e. in a publication or at a conference), the researchers may recontact you to ask your consent to use moments of the video. The video, your reflections, and the interviews will help to build an image of how nonverbal communication in CI looks, feels, and is experienced.

What happens if you choose to withdraw from the study?

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose to withdraw from the study at any point. Should you choose to withdraw from the study, your information, including your reflections, interviews, and video-recorded moments of you with other participants, will not be analysed by the researchers without explicit consent. The video will still be viewed by the researchers so that the dancing of the other participants can be analyzed.

If you choose to withdraw from the study after the video is recorded, the researchers may ask how you feel about them using the already-recorded video. For example, the researchers may ask if they can use moments of the video in which you are on-screen, but not the focus of the moment. This, again, is entirely voluntary, so you may choose to consent or not consent to the researchers' request.

How will results be disseminated?

Findings from the study will be published in a thesis and may be published in reports, journals, and/or included in presentations. A summary of the results will be made available to participants before the thesis is completed, and participants will be informed about how to access to any published materials produced through the data.

Who can you contact if you have questions about the study?

If you have any questions at any time during this project, you may contact Ms. Brynn Williams:

[REDACTED]

Who can you contact if you have any concerns about the study?

If you have any concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, contact the Research Participant Complaint Line in the UBC Office of Research Ethics at 604-822-8598 or if long distance e-mail RSIL@ors.ubc.ca or call toll free 1-877-822-8598.

Sincerely,

Dr. Barbara Weber

Brynn Williams

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM
(PLEASE RETURN THIS PAGE TO THE RESEARCHER)

Study Title: *Nuances of Touch*

Researcher: Brynn Williams
Graduate Student, Program of Human Development, Learning, and Culture,
Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology and Special Education
E-mail: [REDACTED]

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Study Title: *Nuances of Touch*

Taking part in this study is entirely up to you. You have the right to refuse to participate in this study. If you decide to take part, you may choose to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and without any negative impact.

Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study.

Please indicate any dietary restrictions you have:

Do you wish to be identified by name on any material published from the findings of this study?

- Yes, I wish to be identified by name.
- No, I do not wish to be identified by name.

Participant

Signature

Date

Participant Printed Name

Appendix B: Deception Debriefing Script

This script follows the jam stage of data collection:

“Thank you for participating in the first section of this study. The second half of data collection for this study is the individual interviews. I will be contacting each of you within the next few days about times and locations that may work for you.

Before we get to the interviews, I want you to know the focus of this study. Initially I said that the study looks at interaction and communication in contact improvisation (CI) dance. This is the case; however, the study is specifically focusing on the idea of consent within CI.

Moving into the interview stage, there will be more of a focus on consent, how it is being practiced on the dance floor, and how you experience it in CI. Short clips from the video today, will serve as a jumping off point for our individual discussions.

I did not tell you that the focus is on consent at the beginning of the study, because I did not want it to influence the way that you danced. I did not want you to “perform” consent for the camera. Even without trying, I know how words, or any additional stimuli, can influence how we dance. I wanted to capture a jam, as pure as possible, and then see what we find as “consent” already occurring within that space.

If you have any questions about this, please feel free to talk to me or email me at any point. I’d also like to remind you that this entire study is voluntary, so you are able to withdraw at any point as well.”

Appendix C: Interview Questions and Sample Interview Script

Interview Questions

The interview is semi-structured, guided by the questions included below as well as questions prompted by material created in the research process by the participants.

Guiding Questions:

The guiding questions below work to address these main research questions: (a) How is consent embodied and communicated nonverbally in a contact improvisation dance? (b) What do these communication look like and feel like? And, (c) how do the experiences of consent communication differ for dancers involved in the same moment of conflict or consent?

- How do you embody consent?
- How do you say “yes” or “no” with your body?
- What was your lived experience in the jam?
- How do you communicate nonverbally in CI?
- What does consent mean to you in the context of contact improvisation?

Video-based and Reflection-based Questions:

Specific questions will be developed based on participants’ reflections and video clips. The questions will vary from interview to interview. Using a phenomenological lens, the researcher will ask questions that evoke embodiment and invite interviewees into their sensory experiences.

The researcher will use each individual’s reflections to help the individuals recall the jam and as an initial point of inquiry. For example, if a participant writes about a moment of noticing the sound of feet on the floor, the researcher might evoke the participant’s memories of lived experience by asking:

- Can you tell me about what you heard during the jam? How did the sound of feet on the floor impact your movement?

Following a discussion of their reflections, the researcher will have selected two to four salient moments of communication of consent involving the dancers, and dive deeply into these moments through questions. The researcher will show the video clip to the participant and use it to inquire into how consent is communicated in CI. For example, the researcher may address a moment in the video that involves what appears as a negotiation of consent and ask:

- What is happening here?
- What does/did it feel like?
- Where do you feel it?
- Did you give consent?
- How did you do it?
- How did you understand the other giving, or not giving, consent?
- Is how you see this now different than how it felt?

Final Question:

At the end of the interview to gather participants’ final thoughts, the researcher will ask:

- What else is important to know about this topic? Or, what haven’t we talked about yet on this topic that you think I need to know?

Sample Interview Script

Overview:

1. Welcome: get settled, review today's plan, reiterate goal of research, about you question
 2. Your Experience: opening question
 3. Reflections: discussion using reflections
 4. Video: discussion using video and guiding questions
 5. Conclusion: open-ended question to end
-

Welcome:

- Welcome
- Plan for the interview
- Re-introduction into the topic/project:
 - o Looking to Discuss:
 - Embodied and nonverbal communication of consent
 - Honing-in on subtleties, complexities, sensuality on the lived experience of those moment of communication
 - How moments of consent are occurring on the floor and the details of lived experience within them (feel, see, hear, smell, with what parts of the body, maybe textures, pressure, temperature, all the sensory experiences within a moment, etc.)
 - o Research Questions:
 - (a) How is consent embodied and communicated nonverbally in a contact improvisation dance?
 - (b) What do these communication look like and feel like? And,
 - (c) how do the experiences of consent communication differ for dancers involved in the same moment of conflict or consent?

To start, can you tell me a little bit more about you? And about your experience in CI?

Opening Question:

Thinking back to two Sundays ago, is there anything or any moment that really stands out to you (is unusual/worth noticing) from the jam?

A moment which you think/feel may be related in some way to nonverbal communication of consent? (You don't have to know how; we can explore that together)

Reflection-based questions:

Reflection Questions A: Unusually high awareness of the other dancers. And, also of the smallness of the space and of the mirror. What does this feel like in your body? How do you come to it? What does this awareness do in terms of your nonverbal communication with other dancers? Of consent?

Reflection Questions B: Eye contact. One way we might communicate non-verbally is with our eyes, you mentioned eye contact in your reflection. Is there a moment that stands out? How do you find sensing with your eyes impact your communication? Of consent? Yes/no? Asking/offering? Refusing/agreeing/negotiating?

Additional Notes from Reflection:

Moments remembered: (a) warm-up and standing, (b) gentle weight sharing into increased trust and playfulness, (c) trios and quartets – one lovely careful quintet, (d) eye contact, humour, and warmth, (e) a want for more time, and slower dances, unusual to be so quickly energetic

Video-based questions & clips:

- What is happening here?
- What does/did it feel like?
- Where do you feel it?
- Did you give consent?
- How did you do it?
- How did you understand the other giving, or not giving, consent?
- Is how you see this now different than how it felt?
- Evoking senses: eyes, skin, ears, nose, tongue, center, weight, pressure, temperature, texture, think, feel, see, touch, sense, taste, smell, hear

Video moments to watch and address:

Video A: 15:44-16:03

Video B: 52:22-52:23

Video C: 26:50-27:30

Video D: 34:41-35:56 [V2 5:30-7:00]

Video E: 42:40-43:00

Video F: 43:18-43:40

Video G: 16:15-16:25

Video H: 56:30 [brought forward by participant during interview]

Video I: 49:00 [brought forward by participant during the interview]

Final Question and Discussion:

What else is important to know about this topic? Or, what haven't we talked about yet on this topic that you think I need to know?

OR

Is there anything you think/feel we've missed or didn't quite touch on during the discussion? Something you wanted to add or touch on?